Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca
Cluj Center for Indian Studies

Romanian Journal of Indian Studies



Editor-in-Chief: **Mihaela Gligor**

Presa Universitară Clujeană

Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca
Cluj Center for Indian Studies

Romanian Journal of Indian Studies

No. 8   2024

Editor-in-Chief:
Mihaela Gligor

Presa Universitară Clujeană / Cluj University Press
2024

Romanian Journal of Indian Studies

No. 8 2024

Romanian Journal of Indian Studies

Editor-in-Chief:

Mihaela Gligor

With the generous support of

Ministry of Culture
Government of India
सत्यमेव जयते

सत्यमेव जयते
Embassy of India to Romania
Ambasada Indiei în România

Romanian Journal of Indian Studies is abstracted and indexed in **C.E.E.O.L.** (Central and Eastern European Online Library GmbH).
https://www.ceeol.com/search/journal-detail?id=1944

On the cover: *Kritaniyas* © Sanjay Gopal Sarkar
Used with permission.

ISSN: 2601 – 064X
ISSN-L 2601 – 064X

Gligor, Mihaela (Ed.)

CLUJ UNIVERSITY PRESS
Director: Codruţa Săcelean
51, Haşdeu Street
400371, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Tel./Fax: +40 264 597 401
editura@editura.ubbcluj.ro
http://www.editura.ubbcluj.ro/

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
Cluj Center for Indian Studies
Romanian Journal of Indian Studies
Correspondence/Submissions:
mihaela.gligor@ubbcluj.ro

CONTENT

Romanian Journal of Indian Studies

ARGUMENT

Mihaela GLIGOR
Cluj Center for Indian Studies
Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca

> "India is seen as a country of immense diversity, of distinct hopes, of vast and disparate beliefs, of extraordinary customs and a genuine feast of opinions. The cultural heritage of contemporary India combines the Islamic influences with the Hindu ones, as well as those pertaining to other traditions, and the outcome of the interaction among different religious communities can be fully seen in literature, music, painting, architecture and many other fields." (Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize laureate)

India is a mixture of emotions, colours, feelings, music, happiness, sorrow, life and death, gods and people. India is an endless puzzle which each soul that meets its mystery tries to solve. India is infinite, just as untrammelled as the fascination that it produces in the others.

India is an incredibly rich culture, with a history of thousands of years. It saw the rise of various civilizations, religions, dynasties, human groups, cultures, and arts. India has been presented and represented in many forms in literary discourses, arts, and heritage symbols. But the country is so vast that there always remains an area to be explored. Moreover, there are many new things to be interpreted. Any discussion on anything belonging to India and its culture is incomplete without interdisciplinary dialogue between various cultural aspects and elements.

Through its incredible stories, India has always attracted people of distant places from archaeologists, travelers, merchants, artists to

scientists, and academic researchers. Its rich diversity and its myths, legends, arts or music fascinated and allured many minds. The languages of India, from Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Tamil, the regional languages from the ancient times, to Persian and Urdu from the medieval times, and English, Bengali or Hindi from the modern period, were and still are fascinating for linguists and researchers.

The *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* seeks and encourages interdisciplinary approaches in linguistics, literature and literary studies, Indian philosophy, history of religions, political philosophy, and history of ideas, science, anthropology, sociology, education, communications theory, history, and performing arts. One of its primary aims is the integration of the results of the several disciplines of the humanities so that its studies will have a synthetic character in order to acquaint the reader with the progress being made in the general area of Indian Studies.

The *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* is affiliated to the *Cluj Center for Indian Studies*, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca. The Journal appears once per year and it is dedicated to Romanian and international researchers with various interests in Indian cultures.

The present issue of *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* appears with the generous support of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and the Embassy of India in Romania.

STUDIES

Doctrinal Perspectives of the Hindu Philosophical Systems on the Epistemological and Ontological Status of the Vedas

B.N. HEBBAR
George Washington University, U.S.A.

Abstract: This article is merely intended to summarize the four principal viewpoints of the systems of Classical Hindu thought on the supreme scriptures of Brahminical Hinduism, i.e., the Vedas. It does not give nor delve into the long-winded arguments advanced by the schoolmen of each of these systems that seek to justify their positions on their doctrine of scripture and its associated and ancillary issues.

Keywords: Hindu philosophy, Vedas, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya-Yoga, Mīmāṁsā, Vedānta, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Madhva.

Introduction

All the traditions of Indian thought (Jain, Buddhist, and Hindu) have enunciated the number of sources of knowledge (pramāṇas) they accept. Among the Brahminical Hindu systems of thought, the Sāṅkhya-Yoga, the Rāmānuja and the Madhva schools of Vedānta accept three (perception, inference, and verbal testimony), the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika accepts four (perception, inference, analogy, and verbal testimony), the

Prabhākara school of Mīmāṁsā accepts five (perception, inference, analogy, implication, and verbal testimony), and the Kumārila school of Mīmāṁsā, and the Śaṅkara school of Vedānta accept six (perception, inference, analogy, implication, verbal testimony, and non-apprehension).

Among these sources of knowledge, verbal testimony (śabda) is divided into two types: worldly testimony (laukīka śabda), and scriptural testimony (vedavākya). The term 'śabda' literally means 'sound' or 'word.' In this context, the main argument among the Brahminical Hindu systems of thought is over the issue of whether sound (śabda) is eternal or non-eternal. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and the Sāṅkhya systems, each for their own reasons, opine that sound is non-eternal. The Mīmāṁsā and Vedānta systems, on the other hand, uphold the view that sound is eternal. This difference of opinion over the ontological status of sound obviously had implications over whether the most sacred Scriptures of the Brahminical Hindus, i.e., Vedas, are eternal or non-eternal.

The Vedas

The Vedas were poetic praises of the deities of the Indic branch of the Indo-Iranian peoples composed in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent in the 2nd millennium BCE.

The term 'veda' comes from the Sanskrit verbal root √*vid* meaning 'to perceive' or 'to know.' The Vedas received their name 'knowledge' on account of the spiritual insights they offered. The Vedas are regarded traditionally four in number. They are the Ṛg, Sāma, Yajur and Atharva. Even here, the first three are a holy group referred to simply as 'trayī' (three). The Ṛgveda is the oldest, and its musical extracted variant is the Sāmaveda. The Yajurveda contains ritual formulae, and the Atharvaveda, magical spells, incantations, and other occult stuff. Later, the rituals became quite elaborate and detailed which became a set of manuals known as the Brāhmaṇas attached to each of the four Vedas. In

its final phase, the Vedas had metaphysical texts known as the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads. So, the Vedas had at least a thousand years of formation from simple divinely inspired poetry of the samhitās, to the creation of complex rituals of the Brāhmaṇas, to the expounding of profound metaphysics of the Upaniṣads.

Because of their antiquity as well as spiritual content in the context of Indian civilization, the Vedas acquired a special status in Brahminical Hinduism. Eventually, when the Hindu sacred lore came to be fully developed, the Vedas came to be referred to as 'śruti' while the rest of the Hindu sacred lore were relegated to a secondary status (subordinated to the Vedas) known as 'smṛti'.

With the coming into being of traditions opposed to the teachings of the Vedas such as Jainism and Buddhism, the Vedas had some spiritual competition. The Jain religious tradition, rejecting the Vedas, developed their own sacred lore based on the teachings of their 24 spiritual masters (tīrthaṅkaras). Buddhism too, in all its three major branches (Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna), rejected the Vedas and eventually developed its own scriptural canon depending on the branch of that huge spiritual tradition.

Given its special status in post-Buddhistic Brahminical Hinduism, the metaphysical status of the Vedas became a major issue among the Hindu philosophical systems. Among these Hindu philosophical systems, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika held one view about the epistemological and ontological status of the Vedas, the Sāṅkhya held the second view, and the Mīmāṁsā and the Vedānta systems held the third view.

The perspective of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system on the Vedas

According to the metaphysicians of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system, the Vedas are authored by God (Īśvara). This view is upheld by several of

the system's philosophers such as Kaṇāda,[1] Annambhaṭṭa,[2] and Jayanta.[3] Secondly, the Vedas are non-eternal[4] because they are destroyed at the end of a cosmic cycle (kalpa), and recreated by God at the commencement of the next cosmic period. This doctrine too is attested to by the metaphysicians of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system. Thirdly, the Vedas are extrinsically validated (parataḥprāmāṇya). The Vedas are considered to be authoritative because God is their author. Thus, the Vedas receive their validity from an external authoritative source, i.e., God. The metaphysicians of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system are staunch advocates of the doctrine of the extrinsic validity of all knowledge (parataḥprāmāṇyavāda).[5] According to them, all knowledge arises neutrally (neither valid nor invalid), and is validated or invalidated by another source. In the case of the Vedas, that another source is God.

The perspective of the Sāṅkhya system on the Vedas

According to the metaphysicians of the Sāṅkhya system, the Vedas are authorless[6]. Secondly, the Vedas are non-eternal since they too like

---

[1] tadvacanādāmnāyasya prāmāṇyam (Vaiśeṣika Sūtras I:1:3).
[2] vaidikamīśvaroktatvātsarvameva pramāṇam (Tarkasaṅgraha 51).
[3] tatra svātantryam īśvarasyeti tatpraṇītatvena vedāḥ pramāṇam iti (Nyāyakalikā 4: 11).
[4] ādimattvādauyindriyakatvāt (Nyāya Sūtras II:2:144); prāmāyāḥ paratantratvāt sargapralayasambhavāt (Nyāyakusumāñjali II:1); pralayottaram pūrvavedanāśāduttaravedasya katham prāmāṇyam mahājanaparigrahasyāpi tadā abhāvāt. śabdasyānityatvam 'utpanno gakāra' iti pratītisiddham. pravāhāvicchedarūpanityatvamapi pralayasambhāvannāstīti bhāvaḥ (Kusumāñjaliparimala II: 1).
[5] "neither validity nor invalidity is self-evident, that both are constituted and known by external conditions." (p. 84, *Nyāya Theory of Knowledge*) (vide, pp. 84-89, *Nyāya Theory of Knowledge*).
[6] na pauruṣeyatvam tatkartuḥ puruṣasyābhāvāt. (Sāṅkhya Sūtra V: 46).

ordinary words perish as soon as they are pronounced.[7] Thirdly, the Vedas are intrinsically validated (svataḥprāmāṇya)[8] since they are authorless.

The perspective of the Yoga system on the Vedas

According to the metaphysicians of the Yoga system, the Vedas are the source through which one can know about the eminence (prakṛṣṭasattva) of God, and, in turn, the authoritativeness of the Vedas comes from God. The two (Divine eminence and Vedic authoritativeness) are eternally related to each other and are part of the Divine Essence.[9] This sort of reasoning is clearly a case of the fallacy of reciprocal dependence[10] where the knowledge of the Scripture's authority is based in God, and the knowledge of God's eminence, in turn, is based on the Scripture. The commentator Vyāsa initially expounds this logical fallacy, and the sub-commentator Vācaspati, makes no attempt to rectify it.[11] Also, it is utterly surprising that an avowedly dualistic metaphysical tradition like Yoga (also known as Seśvara Sāṅkhya) should have such a monistic view on this particular doctrinal issue.

---

[7] na nityatvam vedānām kāryatvaśruteḥ (Sāṅkhya Sūtra V: 45). pratyakṣeṇāpyuccaritapradhvaṁsino varṇā iti gṛhyante (Sāṅkhya Sūtra vṛtti V: 45).

[8] nijaśaktyabhivyakteḥ svataḥ prāmāṇyam. (Sāṅkhya Sūtra V:51); *Indian Philosophy* Vol. 2, p. 301.

[9] yo'sau prakṛṣṭasattvopādānādīśvarasya śāśvatika utkarṣaḥ sa kim sanimitta āhosvinnirnimitta iti. tasya śāstram nimittam. śāstram kim punaḥ nimittam prakṛṣṭasattvanimittam. etayoḥ śāstrotkarṣayorīśvarasattve vartamānayoranādiḥ saṁbandhaḥ (Yogabhāṣya on Yoga Sūtra I: 24).

[10] *Indian Philosophy* Vol. 2, p. 370.

[11] sa kiṁ sanimittaḥ sapramāṇakaṁ āhosvinnirnimitto niṣpramāṇaka iti. uttaraṁ tasya śāstraṁ nimittam**.** śrutismṛtītihāsapurāṇāni śāstram. pratyakṣānumānapūrvaṁ hi śāstram. na ceśvarasya sattvaprakarṣe kasyacitpratyakṣamanumānaṁ vā'sti. na ceśvarapratyakṣaprabhavaṁ śāstramiti yuktam. kalpayitvā'pi hyayaṁ brūyādātmaiśvaryaprakāśanāyeti bhāvaḥ pariharati (Tattvavaiśāradī on Yogabhāṣya on Yoga Sūtra I: 24).

The perspective of the Mīmāṁsā system on the Vedas

According to both schools of Mīmāṁsā (Prabhākara and Kumārila), the Vedas are authorless.[12] However, the Vedas are eternal.[13] Thirdly, the Vedas are intrinsically validated (svataḥprāmāṇya)[14] since they are authorless.

The perspective of the Vedānta system on the Vedas

Agreeing with their Mīmāṁsā counterparts, all three major schools of Vedānta (Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva) concur that the Vedas are authorless, eternal, and intrinsically valid.

However, the big difference between the Mīmāṁsā and the Vedānta, even though both are scripturalistic systems (śrotrīya darśanas), is that the former is non-theistic while the latter is both absolutistic (Śaṅkara school) and theistic (Rāmānuja and Madhva schools). Since the Mīmāṁsā system does not accept God, to hold that the Vedas are authorless is consistent with that non-theistic stance. However, the stance of the Vedāntic schools to hold that the Vedas are authorless despite the fact that they are accepting of God seems strange at first sight. However, there are reasons for this. The first reason is that the Vedāntic schools hold that the Vedas are eternal,[15] and as such they cannot have an author. The second reason is that the existence of God, according to the Vedāntic schools, can be affirmed only through the authority of the Scripture (Vedas). If God were the author of the Vedas, it would not only make

---

[12] apauruṣeyam vākyam vedaḥ (Arthasaṅgraha 1:10).

[13] tasmān nityaḥ śabdaḥ (Śabarabhāṣya on Mīmāṁsa Sūtra I:1:23); yadi vispaṣṭena hetunā śabdasya nityatvam vaktum śakyāmaḥ. tato nityapratyayasāmarthyāt prayatnenābhivyajyate iti bhaviṣyati. yadi prāguccāraṇābhivyaktaḥ prayatnenābhivyajyate. (Śabarabhāṣya on Mīmāṁsa Sūtra I: 1:12). Words are eternal though their utterance is not. (vide. *Indian Philosophy* Vol. 2, pp. 390-391).

[14] *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 208.

[15] The definition of eternality being “without beginning, middle, nor end” (ādimadhyāntarahita) in the Indian philosophical tradition.

them non-eternal, but lead to the fallacy of reciprocal dependence (parasparāśraya ābhāsa) where the validity of the Vedas would come from God, and the latter's validity would come from the Vedas. These illogical difficulties may be avoided if the Vedas were to be considered as co-eternal with God. This way, the Vedas can vouch for God's existence.

The Śaṅkara school of Vedānta holds the view that Absolute Reality (Nirguṇa Brahman) appears as God (Saguṇa Brahman) and reveals the eternal Vedas at the beginning of each world-period (kalpa). This school holds the view that the word (varṇa) is eternal, but the word-order (varṇakrama) of the Vedas is not. God, thus, depending of His memory of how the word-order was in the previous world periods, reveals the Vedas accordingly.[16]

By contrast, the theistic schools of Vedānta of Rāmānuja[17] and Madhva,[18] hold the view that the word and the word-order of the Vedas are both eternal, and that God being sovereign and independent in all respects, reveals the Vedas in the same order at the commencement of every world-period.[19]

To sum-up, the comparative tables of the four major positions vis-à-vis the Vedas have been provided below.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika view on the Vedas

- Authored by God (Īśvara) (pauruṣeya)
- Non-eternal (anitya)
- Extrinsically valid (parataḥ prāmāṇya)

---

[16] vide, *Indian Philosophy* Vol. 2, pp. 495-496.

[17] sargādau bhagavān caturmukhāya pūrvapūrvakramaviśiṣṭān vedān smṛtvā smṛtvā upādiśatītyuvatyā vedasya nityatvamapauruṣeyam ca siddhamiti karaṇadoṣābhāvo bādhakapratyayābhāvaśca (Yatīndramatadīpikā III: 2).

[18] *A Handbook of Madhvācārya's Pūrṇabrahma Philosophy*, pp. 14-16.

[19] *Dvaita Vedānta*, p. 27.

Sāṅkhya view on the Vedas

- Authorless (apauruṣeya)
- Non-eternal (anitya)
- Intrinsically valid (svataḥ prāmāṇya)

Yoga view on the Vedas

- Authored by God (Īśvara) (pauruṣeya)
- Eternal (nitya)
- Extrinsically valid (parataḥ prāmāṇya)

Mīmāṁsā and Vedānta view on the Vedas

- Authorless (apauruṣeya)
- Eternal (nitya)
- Intrinsically valid (svataḥ prāmāṇya)

References:

Primary sources:

Arthasaṅgraha of Laugākṣi Bhāskara (Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series, Varanasi: 2009)

Kusumāñjaliparimalā of Haridāsa Bhaṭṭācārya (Chaukhamba Vidya Bhavan, Varanasi: 1962)

Mīmāṁsā Sūtras of Jaimini (Panini Office, Allahabad: 1923)

Mīmāṁsā Sūtrabhāṣya of Śabara (Ganesh Press, Calcutta: 1873)

Nyāyakalikā of Jayanta (Sarasvati Bhavan, Varanasi: 1925)

Nyāyakusumāñjali of Udayana (Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series, Varanasi: 2013)

Nyāya Sūtras of Gotama (Anandashrama Sanskrit Series, Pune: 1922)

Sāṅkhya Sūtras of Kapila (Bharati Vidya Prakashan, Varanasi: 2022)

Sāṅkhya Sūtravṛtti of Aniruddha (Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta: 1888)

Tarkasaṅgraha of Annambhaṭṭa (Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series, Varanasi: 1965)

Tattvavaiśāradī of Vācaspati (Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, Varanasi: 1963)

Vaiśeṣika Sūtras of Kaṇāda (University of Baroda Press, Baroda: 1982)

Yatīndramatadīpikā of Śrīnivāsadāsa (Anandashrama Sanskrit Series, Pune: 1956)

Yogabhāṣya of Vyāsa (Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, Varanasi: 1963)

Secondary sources:

Chatterjee, S.C., *Nyāya Theory of Knowledge* (University of Calcutta Press, Calcutta: 1939)

Radhakrishnan, S., *Indian Philosophy* (two volumes) (Macmillan Co., New York: 1958)

Ramachandran, T.P., *Dvaita Vedānta* (Arnold-Heinemann Publishers, New Delhi: 1975)

Rao, A.V., *A Handbook of Madhvācārya's Pūrṇabrahma Philosophy* (Navajeevan Grantha Bhandar, Dharwar: 1954)

Sharma, C.D., *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Barnes & Noble, New York: 1962)

About the author:

B.N. Hebbar has taught Hinduism, Buddhism, and periodically, other Eastern religions and philosophies at George Washington University (Washington DC, USA), for two and half decades. He has had traditional Sanskrit and Pali education in India, a Ph.D. from the University of Utrecht (Netherlands), an honorary D.D., and a D.Litt. from the University of South Africa. He is also interested in Indo-European studies.

Contact: bnhebbar@email.gwu.edu

To Choose or not to Choose Violence? –
Visiting how the Meanings of the Romanian Verb "*a bate*" Translate into Hindi

Hilda-Hedvig VARGA
Independent Researcher, Bucharest

Abstract: The present paper follows the journey of the Romanian verb "*a bate*" (to beat, to hurt, to fight etc.) through the depths of language, uncovering its many uses. Bridging cultural and linguistic distances, it also explores the contextual requirements and changes that happen in Hindi when wanting to obtain the same meanings as those conveyed by the Romanian verb. In addition, it reflects on how a social media post that starts out as a topic for ridicule may become a source for semantic analyses.

Keywords: Hindi language studies, comparative semantics, semantics, comparative linguistics, Romanian verb analysis.

Setting the scene

Social networks and the digital world, in general, hide dangers that the human mind might not even be prepared to comprehend; however, they may prove beneficial when they become an endless source of wonder and may yield true gems. Such is the case of culturally significant elements, in our case quintessential words and expressions with some language-specific (or culturally-specific) uses.

Our curiosity was sparked when a series of expressions and culturally defining items were to be found in a list interestingly entitled, *"Minunata limbă română și curiozitățile ei! Bătaia la români"*[1] or *"De ce iubesc românii bătaia. VIRAL pe rețelele de socializare"*[2]. Many Facebook pages took on the challenge of spreading the news with descriptions suggesting that *Romanians are, par excellence, brawlers*[3], all in the good spirit of virtual humour. The center of attention of this formidable endeavor was the Romanian verb *"a bate"*, loosely translated as *to hit, to hurt* (as its primary meaning). Leaving aside the slightly unflattering light in which both the language and its speakers are put – through the titles and descriptions circulated with this list – it is, nonetheless, quite a fruitful focus on the complexities and nuanced nature of a language. Although a certain date cannot be pinpointed as the origin of the phenomenon, it must have started at the end of 2020, beginning of 2021 (an aftermath of the seclusion episodes determined by the pandemic[4]?)

Ever since coming across the list,[5] we could not lay to rest the idea that it would be a formidable undertaking and learning experience to try and find equivalents to these uses in Hindi, an opportunity that should not be missed to strengthen and enrich our lexicon, living in a country

---

[1] "*The Wonderful Romanian Language and its Curiosities! Romanian Fighting*": https://anonimus.ro/2021/08/minunata-limba-romana-si-curiozitatile-ei-bataia-la-romani/

[2] "*Why Romanians Love Fighting. VIRAL on Social Networks*": https://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/stiri/de-ce-iubesc-romanii-bataia-viral-pe-retelele-de-socializare--285304.html

[3] https://www.facebook.com/100064574717082/posts/1487377251453359/; https://www.facebook.com/1DudumanMariana/posts/limba-noastr%C4%83-i-o-comoar%C4%83-%EF%B8%8Fpreluata-poporul-roman-un-poporde-batausi-%C3%AEn-limba-ro/3468340709940644/

[4] As we all remember, the COVID-19 pandemic started at the onset of 2020.

[5] With negligible variations, the list is much the same across platforms. Examples may be found in the footnotes, with links to the different sites and platforms where it is still available.

where instances of formal Hindi learning from trained natives or locals are either missing or far from enlightening. Here we are, ready to set sail and navigate the treacherous waters of Romanian and Hindi.

And so the journey commences!

For those most fortunate of us,[6] language is the primary means of communication, whether it is in oral or written form. There happens to be a most appropriate saying in Hungarian, that we like to employ on occasion to highlight that language opens doors that would otherwise be closed: „*annyi ember vagy, ahány nyelvet beszélsz*";[7] this roughly translates to *you are as many people as languages that you speak*. Knowing another language gives the individual the chance to, indeed, live a different life as it never comes alone; language, as a principal means of communication, conveys a treasury of information about all aspects of life. Consequently, the learner gets acquainted to the socio-economic, political and cultural backgrounds of the country or territory that uses the target language. By being aware of the practices of the society whose language one is discovering, many embarrassing and dangerous situations can be avoided.[8]

---

[6] Those of us who are not impaired in any way and are able to use language(s) in all its traditional forms.

[7] We grew up hearing this from great-grand parents and grandparents, who were happy to see that I was interested in learning English, having a bilingual (Romanian and Hungarian) home environment; it most probably entered Hungarian via German from the famous quote of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *"wie viele Sprachen du sprichts, sooft mal bist du Mensch"*.

[8] For instance, in Romania, gifting someone a bouquet of flowers in an even number is considered inauspicious as even-numbered flowers are meant for the departed souls. The living always get odd-numbered flowers. Or, in India, eating with the left hand is frowned upon, especially in rural areas. Althought times have changed and mentalities have relaxed, the traveler would not want to attract the disapproval of locals for not knowing that left-handed activities are incompatable with eating because they are linked to bathroom hygiene.

Before embarking on this linguistic adventure, our survival kit needs to be perfected. For our endeavor to be successful, we shall need to cover the plethora of significances attributed to the Romanian *"a bate"*.[9] An outline should suffice: it is a transitive and a reflexive verb, also being used intransitively, and its basic meaning is to hit, to hurt someone or to destroy something using force, the action may be repeated (*a bate cu palma, cu biciul, cu bățul* etc.[10]); a gentle tap on someone's shoulder or back to attract attention or to soothe, to help calm down (+/- human, *a bate pe umăr/spate*[11]); winning in a game or a battle (*a bate pe cineva la ceva/a bate în război*[12]); to repeatedly hit an object (with a tool or an instrument) to obtain a certain outcome (*a bate covoarele, a bate la mașină/calculator, a bate un cui, a bate ouă.*[13])

To make our journey less cumbersome and more entertaining, fresh levels of linguistic nuance shall be revealed with every halt; for this purpose, thematic stations have been created. A series of expressions highlight its versatility, some of which we will uncover in the sections below. As non-native speakers of Hindi, despite experience with the language for over a decade, we have been exposed to a limited variety of words and expressions. Consequently, we may have not found the most splendid corresponding items, but the expedition has been exquisitely wearing and demanding, testimony to the fact that interesting outcomes can only be achieved through diligence. Complementing the original list, we have added a significant array of examples of this versatile verb in action; nonetheless, this paper does not claim to have compiled an exhaustive catalogue.

---

[9] https://dexonline.ro/intrare/bate/5305/definitii
[10] to hit with the hand/palm, with the whip, with the stick/staff/club etc.
[11] to tap the shoulder/back (on).
[12] to beat someone at something/to win in war.
[13] to beat/clean the carpet/rug, to type on a typewriter/computer, to hammer (in/hit a nail), to beat/whip up eggs.

A. Weather/Natural Phenomena Station

1. a bate vântul = the wind to blow
हवा चलना *havā calnā* (lit. the wind to walk/go)

Să te îmbraci gros, **bate vântul** și e frig.
Wear thick clothes, **the wind is blowing** and it is cold.
मोटे कपड़े पहनो, **हवा चल रही है** और ठंड है।[14]

Moṭe kapṛe pahno, ***havā cal rahī hai*** *aur ṭha^{n}ḍ hai.*

2. a bate ploaia = the rain to fall
बारिश होना *bāriś honā* (lit. the rain to be)

Ploaia va bate cu putere în nordul țării.
The rain will pour down[15] in the north of the country.
देश के उत्तर में भारी **बारिश होगी**[16]।

Deś ke uttar me^n bhārī ***bāriś hogī****.*

3. a bate soarele = the sun to shine (usually very brightly)
धूप पड़ना/पड़ जाना *dhūp paṛnā/paṛ jānā* (lit. the sunshine to fall)

Pune-ți pălăria, să nu te **bată soarele** în[17] cap!
Put your hat on, so that you **keep the sun off** your head!
अपनी टोपी पहनो ताकि सिर पर **धूप न पड़ जाए**![18]

Apnī ṭopī pahno tāki sir par ***dhūp na paṛ jāe****.*

---

[14] The example sentences are original. For transliteration, a simplified variant of the *International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST)* has been used, in order to make the reading of the Devanāgarī script in Latin as easy and smooth as possible. No special character has been utilized for consonants of Arabic origin.

[15] It will rain heavily in the north of the country.

[16] घोर वर्षा, *ghor varṣā*

[17] Note that in our native region, the preposition mostly used was *în*, not *la*. The meaning suffers no alterations.

[18] **धूप दूर रखने के लिए** अपनी टोपी पहनो!, *Dhūp dūr rakhne ke lie apnī ṭopī pahno!*

4. a bate grindina = to hail (to rain with hailstone)

ओला पड़ना/ पड़ जाना *olā paṛnā/paṛ jānā* (lit. hail to fall)

A bătut îngrozitor **grindina** ieri pe câmp și a distrus toată recolta.

It **hailed** terribly[19] in the field yesterday and it destroyed the entire crop.

कल खेत में भयंकर **ओला**[20] **पड़ा** और सारी फ़सल नष्ट हो गई।

Kal khet me^{n} *bhaya*^{n}*kar* ***olā paṛā*** *aur sārī fasal naṣṭ ho gaī.*

5. a bate valurile = the waves to hit

लहरें टकराना *lahare*^{n} *ṭakarānā* (lit. waves to collide)

Valuri mari **bat** pe mal și oamenii nu se pot plimba.

Big **waves are hitting** the shore and people cannot have a walk.

बड़ी **लहरें** तट से **टकरा रही हैं** और लोग सैर कर/घूम नहीं पाते।

Baṛī ***lahare***^{n} *taṭ se* ***ṭakarā rahī hai***^{n} *aur log sair kar/ghūm nahī*^{n} *pāte.*

6. a se bate ziua cu noaptea = the day fighting the night (dawn/dusk)

दिन रात से लड़ना/ टकराना/ युद्ध करना

din rāt se laṛnā/ ṭakarānā/ yuddh karnā

(lit. the day to fight/to collide/to wage war with the night)

दिन ढलना *din ḍhalnā* (lit. day to end, i.e. sunlight to go out)

Ce culori frumoase are cerul. E clar că **se bate ziua cu noaptea**.

What beautiful colours the sky has. It is clear that **the day is fighting the night**.

---

[19] There was a terrible hailstorm in the field yesterday and it destroyed the entire crop.

[20] पत्थर (गिरना), *patthar (girnā)*, much like in English *stone*, and Romanian *piatră* (*a cădea piatră, a da cu piatră*).

आकाश में कितने सुन्दर रंग हैं। स्पष्ट है कि **दिन रात से टकरा रहा है/लड़ रहा है/युद्ध कर रहा है/दिन ढल रहा है** ।

*Ākāś me*ⁿ *kitne su*ⁿ*dar ra*ⁿ*g hai*ⁿ. *Spaṣṭ hai ki* ***din rāt se ṭakrā rahā hai/laṛ rahā hai/yuddh kar rahā hai/din ḍhal rahā hai.***

7. a bate pământul (+/- cu picioarele) = to stamp/stomp one's feet, to pond the ground; also to dance

(फ़र्श/ज़मीन से) पैर पटकाना *(farś/zamīn se) pair paṭkānā*

(lit. to throw/flail one's feet «to the ground/floor»)[21]

Ca să îndrepte podeaua din cameră, **bate pământul cu picioarele**.

He is **stamping the ground with his feet** to straighten the floor in the room.

कमरे के फ़र्श को सीधा करने के लिए, वह अपने **पैरों से** ज़मीन को **पटका रहा है**।

Kamre ke farś ko sīdhā karne ke lie, vah apne ***pairo***ⁿ ***se*** *zamīn ko* ***paṭkā rahā hai***.

Uite ce bine dansează! **Bate pământul** (cu picioarele) de iese fum!

Look how well he dances! He **has been stamping the ground** until it's smoking!

देखो कितने अच्छे से नाच रहा है! ज़मीन पर **पैर** ऐसे **पटका रहा है** कि धुआँ उड़ जाए!

Dekho kitne acche se nāc rahā hai! Zamīn par ***pair*** *aise* ***paṭkā rahā hai*** *ki dhuā*ⁿ *uṛ jāe!*

---

[21] Although in English and Hindi, the verb usage may imply little to no control over one's limbs, the Romanian construct usually points to great control over one's moves, as well as high speed and force, hence the smoke (or *așa bate cu picioarele de rupe podeaua*, he/she is so vigorously stomping the feet that he/she might break the floor).

8. a-i bate cuiva vântul în traistă/ prin buzunare = the wind to blow through one's pockets (to be penniless, broke)

जेब ख़ाली होना *jeb khālī honā*[22] (lit. pockets to be empty)

Nu vin cu voi la film că-mi **bate vântul prin buzunare**.

I am not coming to the movies with you because **I am penniless/my pockets are empty**.

मैं आप (लोगों) के साथ फ़िल्म देखने के लिए नहीं चल रही क्योंकि मेरे **जेब ख़ाली हैं**।

*Mai^n āp (logo^n) ke sāth film dekhne ke lie nahī^n cal rahī kyo^{n}ki mere **jeb khālī hai^n**.*

9. a vedea dincotro/ încotro bate vântul = to see which way the wind blows (to act/make decisions based on where the better chances of success are)

हवा चलना *havā calnā* (lit. the wind to walk/go)

Stai să **văd dincotro bate vântul**, apoi am să votez.

Let me **see which way the wind is blowing** and then I'll vote.

पहले देखूँ **हवा किस तरफ़ चल रही है** उसके बाद वोट दूँगा/डालूँगा[23]।

*Pahle dekhū^n **havā kis taraf cal rahī hai**, uske bād voṭ dū^{n}gā/ ḍālū^{n}gā.*

---

[22] जेब ठंडा होना, *jeb ṭa^{n}ḍā honā* (lit. the pockets to be cold).

[23] पहले **हवा का रुख़** देखूँ उसके बाद मतदान दूँगा।, *Pahle havā kā rukh dekhū^n uske bād matdān dū^{n}gā.* – lit. the wind's face, the wind's direction, the state of the situation; we have never heard मतदान (*matdān*) being used in everyday speech.

B. Food Station

10. a bate ouă/laptele/smântâna/frișca/crema = to beat eggs/milk/cream/whipped cream/filling (cream)

फेंटना *phe*^{n}*ṭnā* (lit. to beat, especially eggs or liquidy substances)

Întâi **batem ouăle**, după aceea adăugăm restul ingredintelor și **batem crema** până se omogenizează totul.

First we **beat the eggs**, then we add the rest of the ingredients and **stir/beat the cream** until everything is homogenized.

पहले हम **अंडों को फेंटते हैं**, उसके बाद बाकी सामग्री को डालते हैं और **क्रीम को** तब तक **फेंटते हैं** जब तक सब कुछ समांगीकृत नहीं हो जाता।

Pahle ham ***a***^{n}***ḍo***^{n} ***ko phe***^{n}***ṭṭe hai***^{n}*, uske bād bākī sāmagrī ko ḍālte hai*^{n} *aur* ***krīm ko*** *tab tak* ***phe***^{n}***ṭṭe hai***^{n} *jab tak sab kuch samā*^{n}*gīkr̥t nahī*^{n} *ho jātā.*

11. lapte bătut[24] = buttermilk, curd

छाछ *chāch* buttermilk

Îmi este dor de **laptele bătut** al bunicii.

I miss the **buttermilk** made by my grandmother.

मुझे अपनी दादी/नानी (के हाथों) की **छाछ** की याद आ रही है।

Mujhe apnī dādī/nānī (ke hātho^n*) kī* ***chāch*** *kī yād ā rahī hai.*

12. fasole bătută = mashed beans

---

[24] The understanding of what this drink is may vary across cultures, and its recipes are a statement to that; while in Romania you may obtain *lapte bătut* following a very simple procedure – put the milk into cups, mix in some cream/double cream and let it sit for about 24 hours (in our family, there was never boiling of the milk involved), in English speaking countries, vinegar or lemon juice is a must to make *buttermilk*. As for India, most recipes explaining how to make *chāch* (alt. *chās* or *maṭhṭhā*) state that one needs curd, water and salt (and spices of choice, of course) – this becomes a refreshing beverage to be enjoyed on hot summer days.

राजमा का भरता/भुरता *rājmā kā bhartā/bhurtā* (lit. mashed kidney beans)

I-am zis nevestei să-mi facă o **fasole bătută** la cină.

I told my wife to make me some **mashed beans** for dinner.

मैंने अपनी पत्नी को कहा कि शाम/रात के खाने के लिए वह **राजमा का भुरता** बनाए।

Mai^{n}ne apnī patnī ko kahā ki śām/rāt ke khāne ke lie vah ***rājmā kā bhurtā*** *banāe.*

13. a bate pomul/planta (ex. floarea soarelui, inul) = to shake down a tree, to beat or to pound a plant to release its seeds or fibers, to scotch, to tew (eg. sunflower, flax)

कूटना/पीटना/मारना *kūṭnā/pīṭnā/mārnā* (lit. to beat, to thrash)

Bunicii **au bătut nucii**; urmează **floarea soarelui**.

The grandparents **have shaken down** the walnuts; it is time **to scotch** the sunflower.

दादा-दादी ने अखरोटों को (अखरोट के पेड़ों को) **कूटा/पीटा**; सूरजमुखी की बारी है।

Dādā-dādī ne akhroṭo^n ko (akhroṭ ke peṛo^n ko) ***kūṭā/pīṭā****; sūrajmukhī kī bārī hai.*

14. a bate apa în piuă[25] (să se aleagă untul) = to babble, to chatter, to waffle on

---

[25] This might be very culture-specific, as the *piuă* refers to a contraption used to thicken wool so that the water does not go through it (somewhat waterproofing); wooden hammers would be doing the hard work of beating the material, put into motion with the help of the wheel of the mill (usually, water-powered). If there would be no wool at the fulling mill, its running would be futile, much like someone who speaks a lot, but without substance. We are not familiar with any such expression in Hindi as, most certainly, it may hail from the rural area, to which we have had no access.

बकना/बड़बड़ाना *baknā/baṛbaṛānā* (lit. to babble, to chatter, to talk nonsensically)

De dimineață și până seara **bate apa-n piuă**; mai muncește vreodată?

He **waffles on** and on, from morning to evening; does he ever work/get work done?

सुबह से शाम तक वह **बकता रहता है**; क्या कभी काम भी करता है?

*Subah se śām tak vah **baktā rahtā hai**; kyā kabhī kām bhī kartā hai?*

15. a i se/a-i bate coliva în piept = to beat/drive in *koliva*[26] in/into someone's chest (to be close to death)

मृत्यु/यमराज द्वार पर/दरवाज़ा खटखटाना

mṛtyu/Yamrāj dvār par/darvāzā khaṭkhaṭānā

(lit. death/Yamrāj – *Yama*, god of death and justice – to knock at one's door)

मौत के मुँह में होना

maut ke mu^{n}h me^n honā

(lit. to be in the mouth of death)

मौत सिर पर खेलना

maut sir par khelnā

(lit. death to dance on one's head)

Tu te cerți cu lumea când **îți bate coliva în piept**?

You are arguing with the world when the *koliva* is beating in your chest/is being beaten into your chest?

[26] Ritual sweet dish based on boiled wheat, that may contain nuts and dried fruits depending on local customs, served in the memory of someone who has departed. In Romania, it is customary in the Orthodox Church.

तुम दुनिया से बहस कर रहे हो जब **यमराज द्वार पर खटखटा रहा है/मौत सिर पर खेल रही है?**

Tum duniyā se bahas kar rahe ho jab ***Yamrāj dvār par khaṭkhaṭā rahā hai/maut sir par khel rahī hai****?*

C. Emotion and Cognition Station

16. a-l bate pe cineva gândul = to ponder upon, to think about something (usually quite intently, insistently)

ख़्याल आना *khyāl ānā* (lit. a thought to come)

Mă bate gândul să plec în vacanță săptămâna viitoare.
I **am thinking of** going on a holiday next week[27].
ख़्याल आया कि अगले हफ़्ते मैं छुट्टी पे जाऊँ।

Khyāl āyā *ki agle hafte mai^n chuṭṭī pe jāū^n.*

17. a se bate cu mintea/gândul/gândurile = to be obsessed by a thought, to plan something

ख़्यालों से लड़ना *khyālo^n se laṛnā* (lit. to fight thoughts)

De ani de zile **se bate cu gândurile** sale rele.
He **has been battling** with his bad thoughts for years.
सालों से वह अपने बुरे **ख़्यालों से लड़ रहा है।**

Sālo^n se vah apne bure ***khyālo^n se laṛ rahā hai****.*

18. a bate grija pe cineva[28] = to be restless, preoccupied by some concern

[27] The thought has crossed my mind to go on a holiday next week.
[28] When used in a negative sentence, it indicates the frustration of the speaker/writer regarding the high interest of the interlocutor for his/her business and it is a subtler way of expressing *mind your business.*

चिंता करना *ci^{n}tā karnā,* चिंतित होना *ci^{n}tit honā,* चिंतन में होना/पड़ना *ci^{n}tan me^n honā/paṛnā* (lit. to worry, to be worried – for all three)

परवाह होना/करना *parvāh honā/karnā* (lit. to care)

Îl bate grija dacă băiatul a ajuns cu bine acasă.
He **is concerned** whether the boy reached home safely.
वह **चिंतित है** अगर लड़का ठीक से घर पहुँच गया (या नहीं)।
*Vah **ci^{n}tit hai** agar laṛkā ṭhīk se ghar pahu^{n}c gayā (yā nahī^n).*
Să nu te mai bată grija de copilul meu!
Don't you **worry about** my child anymore!
तुम मेरे बच्चे के बारे में (और) **चिंता** मत किया **करो**[29]!
*Tum mere bacce ke bāre me^n (aur) **ci^{n}tā** mat kiyā **karo**!*

19. a-și bate joc (de cineva/ceva) = to ridicule, to mock, to laugh at; also, to dishonour, to blemish, to rape (especially a woman)

मज़ाक उड़ाना *mazāk uṛānā* (lit. to ridicule, to mock)

इज़्ज़त लूटना[30] *izzat lūṭnā* (lit. to steal, to rob one's honour)

Sătenii **își băteau joc** de bărbat pentru că era sărac.
The villagers used **to mock** the man because he was poor.
गाँववाले आदमी का **मज़ाक उड़ाते थे** क्योंकि वह ग़रीब था।
*Gā^{n}vvāle ādmī kā **mazāk uṛāte the** kyo^{n}ki vah garīb thā.*
Tânărul a atras-o pe fată în pădure și **și-a bătut joc** de ea.
The young man lured the girl into the woods and **dishonoured** her.

---

[29] चिंता करना बंद करो!, *ci^{n}tā karnā ba^{n}d karo!* = stop worrying (about...)

[30] +/- another verb meant to emphasize the action. In Hindi, many simple verbs can easily become compound or complex by the addition of लेना (*lenā*, to take), देना (*denā*, to give), होना (*honā*, to be), जाना (*jānā*, to go, to leave) etc., depending on the case and combination possibilities. There are several such examples across the present paper.

युवक लड़की को प्रलोभित करके/फुसलाके वन में लेकर गया और उसकी **इज़्ज़त लूट ली**।

*Yuvak laṛkī ko pralobhit karke/phuslāke van me^{n} lekar gayā aur uskī **izzat lūṭ lī**.*

D. Household Items Station

20. a bate cu biciul, cu bățul = to whip, to beat with a whip/stick/staff

(डंडे से) मारना/पीटना *(ḍa^{n}ḍe se) mārnā/pīṭnā* (lit. to hit, to beat)

Tatăl l-**a bătut cu bățul** pe băiat pentru că a furat dulciuri.

The father **beat** the boy **with a stick** because he had stolen sweets.

बाप ने बच्चे को **डंडे से मारा/पीटा** क्योंकि उसने मिठाइयाँ चुराई थीं।

*Bāp ne bacce ko **ḍa^{n}ḍe se mārā/pīṭā** kyo^{n}ki usne miṭhāiyā^{n} curāī thī^{n}.*

21. a bate covoarele = to beat/clean the rug/carpet

क़ालीन पीटना/साफ़ करना *kālīn pīṭnā/sāf karnā* (lit. to beat/clean rugs)

Înainte de sărbători, copiii **bat covoarele** pentru a o ajuta pe mamă.

Before the holidays, the children **beat the rugs** to help mother.

त्योहारों से पहले, माँ की मदद करने के लिए बच्चे **क़ालीन पीट/साफ़ कर रहे हैं**।

*Tyohāro^{n} se pahle, mā^{n} kī madad karne ke lie bacce **kālīn pīṭ/sāf kar rahe hai^{n}**.*

22. a bate ceasul/ceasornicul/orologiul = the clock to strike

घड़ी बजना *gharī bajnā* (lit. clock to ring, sound)

Ceasul bate (de) miezul nopții și afară este încă foarte cald.

The **clock strikes** midnight and it is still very hot outside.

घड़ी में आधी रात **बज रही है** और बाहर अभी भी बहुत गर्मी है।

Ghaṛī *me^{n} ādhī rāt* ***baj rahī hai*** *aur bāhar abhī bhī bahut garmī hai.*

23. a bate clopotul/toaca = the bell to ring, to beat the semantron[31]
बजना *bajnā* (lit. to ring on its own); बजाना *bajānā* (lit. someone to hit or make something ring, resound)

Cu ocazia de bun augur a Dīpāvalī, **bat clopotele** în temple.

On the auspicious occasion of Dīpāvalī[32], **bells are ringing** in temples.

दीपावली के शुभ अवसर पर, मंदिरों में **घंटे[33]/घंटियाँ[34] बज रहे/बज रही हैं।**

Dīpāvalī ke shubh avsar par, ma^{n}diro^{n} me^{n} ***gha^{n}ṭe/gha^{n}ṭiyā^{n} baj rahe/baj rahī hai^{n}****.*

Preoții **băteau/trăgeau clopotele** și <u>suflau în scoici</u>.[35]

The priests **were ringing the bells** and <u>blowing on the conch shells</u>.

पंडित **घंटे** और <u>शंख</u> **बजा रहे थे।**

Pa^{n}ḍit ***gha^{n}ṭe*** *aur* <u>*sha^{n}kh*</u> ***bajā rahe the****.*

---

[31] A plank, usually wooden, used in churches and monasteries as a call to prayer instrument; it is beaten rhythmically with one or two mallets. It can be fixed or portable and is mostly found in orthodox churches in Romania. Since this element is culturally-specific, we shall only refer to the bell in the example; any equivalent in Hindi was unavailable in the dictionaries used.

[32] The Hindu festival of lights (October-November).

[33] A larger bell.

[34] A smaller bell.

[35] This is a very interesting example of differences in languages. Since Romanian does not have the same structure of obtaining causatives from verbs, Hindi wins in the economy of language department as it modifies the meaning of an entire sentence by adding a vowel to the verb. Romanian, on the other hand, uses different verbs altogether, especially for an activity such as *blowing on a conch shell* (much like English), this activity being culturally specific to India.

24. a bate la ușă/poartă/fereastră/geam = to knock on the door/at the gate/on the window

दरवाज़ा खटखटाना *darvāzā khaṭkhaṭānā;* (दरवाज़े पर) दस्तक देना *(darvāze par) dastak denā* (lit. to knock on a door)

Bate cineva **la ușă**, du-te și vezi cine e.

Someone **is knocking on the door**, go see who it is.

कोई **दरवाज़ा खटखटा रहा है**, जाकर देखो कौन है।

Koī ***darvāzā khaṭkhaṭā rahā hai****, jākar dekho kaun hai.*

Cine **bate în geam**[36] la ora asta?

Who **is knocking on the window** at this hour?

खिड़की पे कौन **दस्तक दे रहा है**?

Khiṛkī pe *kaun* ***dastak de rahā hai****?*

Fig. Iarna **bate la ușă**.

Winter **is knocking at the door**.

शरद/सर्दी (दरवाज़े पर) **दस्तक दे रही है।**

Śarad/sardī (darvāze par) ***dastak de rahī hai.***

- **a bate la ușă/ușile oamenilor, a bate pe la uși, a bate la toate porțile/la porțile cuiva** = to go from door to door, to ask each and everyone for help, to beg

दर-ब-दर भटकना/जाना *dar-ba-dar bhaṭaknā/jānā* (lit. to wander/go from door to door)

Vecinul a ajuns să **bată pe la uși** de când i-a murit nevasta.

Ever since his wife died, the neighbor ended up **knocking from door to door**.

जब से पत्नी का देहांत हुआ है, पड़ोसी **दर-ब-दर भटक रहा है।**

[36] Note that in our native region, *în geam* și more frequently used for *la fereastră* (economy of speech). The meaning is unaltered, (knock) *on the window.*

Jab se patnī kā dehā^{n}t huā hai, paṛosī ***dar-ba-dar bhaṭak rahā hai****.*
A bătut la toate porțile, dar fără succes.
He **knocked on every door**, but was unsuccessful.
उसने सभी **दरवाज़े/द्वार खटखटाए**, परन्तु असफल हुआ।

Usne sabhī ***darvāze/dvār khaṭkhaṭāe****, parā^{n}tu asaphal huā.*

25. a bate pantoful (încălțămintea) **pe cineva** = a wound caused by friction, blister, shoe bite

जूता काटना *jūtā kāṭnā* (lit. the shoe to bite)

Trebuie să mă așez; **mă bate un pantof**.
I must sit down; I **have a blister**.
मुझे बैठना पड़ेगा; **जूता काट रहा है**।

Mujhe baiṭhnā paṛegā; ***jūtā kāṭ rahā hai****.*

26. a bate un tablou/cui/în cuie = to hang a painting, to drive in/hammer a nail

तस्वीर/चित्र टाँगना *tasvīr/citra ṭā^{n}gnā* (lit. to hang a painting)

कील मारना/लगाना *kīl mārnā/lagānā* (lit. to hit a nail)

A bătut tablourile în pereți.
He **hung the paintings** on the walls[37].
उसने **तस्वीरों को** दीवारों पर **टाँग दिया**।

Usne ***tasvīro^n ko*** *dīvāro^n par* ***ṭā^{n}g diyā****.*
Stai să **bat cuiul** ăsta și vin să mergem la magazin.
Wait until I **hammer** this **nail in** and I will come to go to the shop.
रुको, बस इस **कील को मारूँ**, उसके बाद दुकान चलने के लिए आता हूँ।

---

[37] *He nailed the paintings to the walls* would be grammatically correct, but logically odd, inappropriate. One usually nails a painting or a canvas to a frame, not a wall, then hanging it on the wall. Also note the original Romanian example, where *pe pereți* is more frequent than *în pereți*.

*Ruko, bas is **kīl ko mārū^{n}**, uske bād dukān calne ke lie ātā hū^{n}.*

27. a bate în pietre – more frequently **bătut în pietre/diamante** etc. = to decorate an object, studded with precious stones, jewels, to set, to inlay, to mount

(हीरों से) जड़ा हुआ (हार) *(hīro^{n}) se jaṛā huā (hār)* (lit. inlayed with)

Maria și-a cumpărat un colier **bătut în diamante**.
Maria bought herself a diamond necklace[38].
मारिया ने एक हीरों से **जड़ा हुआ** हार खरीदा[39]।

*Māriyā ne ek hīro^{n} se **jaṛā huā** hār kharīdā.*

28. a bate mingea (+/- pe maidan) = to hit/beat/play with the ball (+/- on the field)

गेंद (को) मारना *ge^{n}d mārnā* (lit. to hit the ball)

गेंद से खेलना *ge^{n}d se khelnā* (lit. to play with the ball)

Când era mic, Mihai **bătea mingea** toată ziua.
When he was little, Mihai would **hit/beat/play with the ball** all day long.
जब छोटा था, मिहाई पूरा दिन **गेंद को मारता था[40]/गेंद से खेला करता था।**

*Jab choṭā thā, Mihāī pūrā din **ge^{n}d ko mārtā thā/ ge^{n}d se khelā kartā thā**.*

---

[38] In English, we do not use a specific word or phrase to convey the fact that diamonds were mounted; we simply put the type of stone before the type of jewelry: diamond necklace, emerald bracelet, ruby earrings etc.
[39] The same can be achieved in Hindi using a possessive construction: हीरों का हार, *hīro^{n} kā hār* (a necklace of diamonds); see footnote above.
[40] This option is quite unnatural and best be avoided.

29. a bate în lemn = touch wood, the gesture of knocking on wood (usually three times) in the hopes of preventing a sorrowful event from happening, or to avert an illness; also, to bring good luck and prolong a favourable situation

नज़र लगना[41] *nazar lagnā* (lit. the evil eye to stick)

नज़र न लगे[42] *nazar na lage* (lit. the evil eye not to stick)

Bat în lemn, data trecută a mers totul bine așa că mă aștept la același lucru și acum.

Touchwood, everything went well last time so I expect the same this time as well.

नज़र न लगे, पिछली बार सब कुछ ठीक गया था तो आशा है कि इस बार भी ऐसा हो।

***Nazar na lage**, pichlī bār sab kuch ṭhīk gayā thā to āśā hai ki is bār bhī aisā ho.*

E. Body Parts Station

30. a bate pe cineva la cap/a bate capul cuiva = to pester, to nag someone (usually to obtain something)

दिमाग़ खाना *dimāg khānā* (lit. to eat someone's brain)

De o lună, fetița îl **bate la cap** pe tatăl ei să-i cumpere o bicicletă.

The girl **has been pestering** her father to buy her a bicycle for a month.

---

[41] Culturally specific, it highlights the superstitious nature of the Orientals, being a more Muslim-inclined custom, with the evil eye that protects people. In the Hindu world, the placing of a black dot of kohl behind the ear is the equivalent of warding off the evil eye, काला टीका लगाना, *kālā ṭīkā lagānā.*

[42] Functions often as a fixed expression. As given above, the verb may be used in a variety of instances and tenses.

एक महीने से, बच्ची अपने पिता का **दिमाग़ खा रही है** कि वह उसके लिए एक साइकिल खरीदे।

Ek mahīne se, baccī apne pitā kā ***dimāg khā rahī hai*** *ki vah uske lie ek sāikil kharīde.*

Cât **mi-a bătut capul** cu faptul că a câștigat nu știu ce premiu și a apărut în ziar!

How much he's **been bragging/nagging** me **about** the fact that he won some prize and appeared in a newspaper!

उसने मेरा **दिमाग़** कितना **खाया है** कि कोई पुरस्कार जीता और किसी अख़बार में आया है।

Usne merā ***dimāg*** *kitnā* ***khāyā hai*** *ki koī puraskār jītā aur kisī akhbār me*^{n} *āyā hai.*

31. a-și bate capul (pentru/de) ceva = to rack one's brain, to be concerned, to struggle; negat. to not be bothered, to not give a hard time

दिमाग़ लगाना/दौड़ाना *dimāg lagānā/dauṛānā*

(lit. to put one's mind to it, to make the mind run)

सिर मारना *sir mārnā* (lit. to hit the head)

Sărmana femeie **își bate capul** cum să-și scoată fiul din închisoare.

The poor woman **has been racking her brains out** how to get her son out of jail.

बेचारी औरत **दिमाग़ लगा रही है** कि कैसे अपने बेटे को कारागृह से छुड़वाए।

Becārī aurat ***dimāg lagā rahī hai*** *ki kaise apne beṭe ko kārāgr̥h se chuṛvāe.*

<u>Nu vreau</u> **să-mi bat capul** cu problema asta acum.

I cannot **be bothered** by this issue now.

मुझे इस समस्या के लिए **दिमाग़ अभी नहीं दौड़ाना।**

Mujhe is samasyā ke lie ***dimāg abhī nahī^n dauṛānā****.*

32. bătut în cap = brainless, empty-headed, stupid, idiot, crazy

मूर्ख *mūrkh,* बेअक़ल *beakal,* बेवकूफ़ *bevakūf* (lit. stupid, brainless, idiot)

भेजा ख़ाली (होना) *bhejā khālī (honā)* (lit. «to be» empty-headed)

Ești **bătut în cap**? Cum să nu înțelegi nici după ce ți s-a explicat de patru ori?

Are you **brainless**? How can you not understand even after being explained to four times?

भेजा ख़ाली है क्या? चार बार समझाने के बाद कैसे नहीं समझते?

Bhejā khālī *hai kyā? Cār bār samjhāne ke bād kaise nahī^n samajhte?*

33. a se bate cap în cap = to butt heads, to be in opposition, to disagree

सिर टकराना *sir ṭakrānā* (lit. heads to collide)

माथापच्ची करना *māthāpaccī karnā* (lit. to rack the brains)

De azi dimineață **ne batem cap în cap** și nu reușim să cădem de acord.

We **have been butting heads** since morning and are unable to reach an agreement.

सुबह से हम **सिर टकरा रहे हैं** और सहमत नहीं हो पा रहे हैं।

Subah se ham ***sir ṭakrā rahe hai^n*** *aur sahmat nahī^n ho pā rahe hai^n.*

34. a se bate[43] **cu capul de pereți/toți pereții** = to bang the head against the walls, to be hopeless, to regret making a mistake

सिर दीवारों से मारना/फोड़ना/टकराना

sir dīvāro^{n} *se mārnā/phoṛnā/ṭakrānā*

(lit. to hit, bang the head against the walls)

Nu are rost să te **bați cu capul de toți pereții**; se va rezolva și problema asta.

There is no use in **banging your head against the walls**; this problem shall too have a solution.

अपना **सिर दीवारों से मारने** का कोई मतलब नहीं; इस समस्या का भी हल होगा।

Apnā ***sir dīvāro***^{n} ***se mārne*** *kā koī matlab nahī*^{n}*; is samasyā kā bhī hal hogā.*

- **a bate cu capul de pereți/ toți pereții** = to bang someone's head against the walls

S-a enervat atât de tare că băiatul a picat examenul că l-**a bătut cu capul de pereți**.

He got so angry that the boy failed the exam that he **banged his head against the walls**.

वह इतना गुस्सा हो गया कि लड़का परीक्षा में असफल रहा कि उसने उसके **सिर को दीवारों से मारा**।

Vah itnā gussā ho gayā ki parīkṣā me^{n} *laṛkā asaphal rahā ki usne uske* ***sir ko dīvāro***^{n} ***se mārā****.*

35. a bate cu fruntea în nori = to reach, hit the clouds with one's forehead, i.e. to be very tall

---

[43] Also *a se da cu* [...].

(बादलों से/में) माथे से टकराना/मारना[44] *(bādalo^{n} se/me^{n}) māthā ṭakrānā/mārnā*

(lit. to hit the clouds with the forehead)

L-ai văzut pe Victor ieri? **Bate cu fruntea în nori**! Cum s-a făcut atât de înalt?

Did you see Victor yesterday? He **was hitting the clouds with his forehead**! How did he grow so tall?

तुमने विक्टर को कल देखा? **माथे से बादलों में मारता है**! इतना लंबा कैसे हो गया?

*Tumne Vikṭar ko kal dekhā? **Māthe se bādalo^{n} me^{n} mārtā hai**! Itnā la^{m}bā kaise ho gayā?*

36. a se bate cu pumnii în piept = to beat the chest with the fists, to talk tall, to display pride; to create unnecessary ruckus about an issue; to lament, to express regret, remorse

छाती फुलाना *chātī phulānā* (lit. to swell one's chest)

(मुट्ठी से) छाती पीटना/मारना *(muṭṭhhī se) chātī pīṭnā/mārnā* (lit. to beat one's chest with the fists)

Nu te mai **bate cu pumnii în piept** că nu ești singurul care a depus efort să ajungă la acest nivel.

Stop beating your chest with your fists/talking tall because you are not the only one who has put in effort to reach this level.

छाती इतना मत **फुलाओ**, तुम इकलौता इंसान नहीं हो जो मेहनत करके इस मुक़ाम पर पहुँचा हो।

***Chātī** itnā mat **phulāo**, tum iklautā i^{n}sān nahī^{n} ho jo mehnat karke is mukām par pahu^{n}cā ho.*

---

[44] Also छूना, *chūnā*, to touch.

Să vezi cum, la moartea copilului, mama se **bătea cu pumnii în piept** de disperare a fost îngrozitor.

To see how, upon her child’s death, the mother **was beating her chest with her fists** in despair was horrendous.

बच्चे के देहांत पर, माँ को निराशा में (मुट्ठियों से) **छाती पीटते** हुए देखकर भयंकर था।

Bacce ke dehā^{n}t par, mā^{n} ko nirāśā me^{n} (muṭṭhiyo^{n} se) ***chātī pīṭte*** *hue dekhkar bhaya^{n}kar thā.*

37. a bate cu pumnul în masă = to bang on the table (with the fist), to impose one’s viewpoint

(मुक्का) मेज़ पर मारना *(mukkā) mez par mārnā* (lit. to hit the table with the fist)

Bărbatul **a bătut cu pumnul în masă** și a zis că mama lui trebuie salvată.

The man **banged on the table** and said that his mother must be saved.

आदमी ने **मेज़ पर (मुक्का) मारा** और कहा कि उसकी माँ को बचाना पड़ेगा।

Ādmī ne ***mez par (mukkā) mārā*** *aur kahā ki uskī mā^{n} ko bacānā paṛegā.*

38. a bate din palme = to clap, to applaud

ताली बजाना *tālī bajānā* (lit. to clap, to hit the palms to create sound)

Copilul nu **a bătut** deloc **din palme**, semn că nu i-a plăcut piesa de teatru.

The child **did not clap** at all, a sign that he did not like the play.

बच्चे ने **ताली** बिलकुल नहीं **बजाई**, यह संकेत था कि उसे नाटक पसंद नहीं आया।

*Bacce ne **tālī** bilkul nahī^{n} **bajāī**, yah sa^{n}keṭ thā ki use nāṭak pasa^{n}d nahī^{n} āyā.*

- **cât ai bate din palme** = quickly, rapidly, immediately[45]
  पलक झपकते (ही) *palak jhapakte (hī)* (lit. in the blink of an eye)

  तुरंत/फ़ौरन/झटपट *tura^{n}t/fauran/jhaṭphaṭ* (lit. immediately, quickly, in no time)

  A terminat curățenia **cât ai bate din palme**.
  He finished cleaning **in no time/in the blink of an eye**.
  पलक झपकते ही/झटपट उसने सफ़ाई समाप्त की/पूरी कर ली।

  ***Palak jhapakte hī/jhaṭphaṭ** usne safāī samāpt kī/pūrī kar lī.*

39. a bate palma = to shake on it, to strike/secure a deal
हाथ मिलाना *hāth milānā* (lit. to meet hands)

Rusia **a bătut palma** cu China pentru a întări relațiile economice și a crește comerțul între cele două țări.

Russia **shook hands** with China to strengthen economic relations and increase commerce between the two countries.

दोनों देशों के बीच आर्थिक संबंधों को मज़बूत करने और व्यापार बढ़ाने के लिए, रूस ने चीन से **हाथ मिलाया है**।

*Dono^{n} deśo^{n} ke bīc ārthik sa^{m}ba^{n}dho^{n} ko mazbūt karne aur vyāpār baṛhāne ke lie, Rūs ne Cīn se **hāth milāyā hai**.*

[45] at the drop of a hat, in the blink of an eye, in a heartbeat

40. a se bate[46] **cu mâna/palma peste gură** = to clap/hit one's mouth with one's hand – as a punishment for having uttered something ungodly or reckless

(हाथ से) मुँह पे मारना *(hāth se) mu^{n}h pe mārnā* (lit. to hit one's mouth with one's hand)

Nu ți-e rușine să spui așa ceva? **Bate-te cu mâna peste gură**!

Are you not ashamed to say something like that? **Clap/Hit over your mouth with your hand**!

ऐसी बात कहते हुए शर्म नहीं आती? (हाथ से) **मुहं पे मारो**!

Aisī bāt kahte hue śarm nahī^{n} ātī? (Hāth se) ***mu^{n}h pe māro****!*

41. a bate la ochi = to catch the attention, the eye of someone; something or someone that is showy, flashy, loud, to be problematic; to raise an eyebrow, to be frowned upon

ध्यान देने योग्य/लायक *dhyān dene yogya/lāyak* (lit. worth attention)

Nu ți se pare că **bate la ochi** faptul că a fost avansat deși nu are nici vechimea și nici experiența necesare?

Shouldn't it **raise an eyebrow** the fact that he was promoted although he neither has the seniority, nor the necessary experience?

तुमको यह बात **ध्यान देने योग्य** नहीं लगती कि उसके पास न आवश्यक वरिष्ठता और न ही अनुभव होने के बावजूद भी उसकी पदोन्नति हुई है?

Tumko yah bāt ***dhyān dene yogya*** *nahī^{n} lagtī ki uske pās na āvaśyak variṣṭatā aur na hī anubhav hone ke bāvajūd bhī uskī padonnati huī hai?*

42. a bate cuiva obrazul = to reproach, to criticize someone for a misconduct

---

[46] Also *a-și da cu mâna* [...].

निंदा करना *ni^{n}dā karnā* (lit. to reproach), धिक्कारना *dhikkārnā* (lit. to spurn, to curse)[47]

Bătrâna i-**a bătut obrazul** șoferului care a trecut în goană pe culoarea verde pentru pietoni.

The old lady **criticized** the driver who zoomed past on the green for pedestrians.

बूढ़ी औरत ने ड्राइवर की **निंदा की/को धिक्कारा** जिसने पैदल यात्रियों के हरे रंग पर तेज़ी से चलाया।

Būṛhī aurat ne ḍraivar kī ***ni^{n}dā kī/ko dhikkārā*** *jisne paidal yātriyo^{n} ke hare ra^{n}g par tezī se calāyā.*

43. a bate din gură degeaba/a bate gura de pomană = to waste words, to throw words away, to talk to the wind, to waste/spend one's breath, to speak uselessly

व्यर्थ में बोलना *vyarth me^{n} bolnā* (lit. to speak in vain), समय बरबाद करना *samay barbād karnā* (lit. to waste time)

Vă **bateți gura de pomană**. Nu vedeți că nu ascultă?

You **are wasting your breath**. Can't you see he is not listening?

आप उसे **व्यर्थ में समझा[48] रही हैं**। आप देख नहीं रहीं कि वह सुन नहीं रहा?

Āp use ***vyarth me^{n} samjhā rahī hai^{n}****. Āp dekh nahī^{n} rahī^{n} ki vah sun nahī^{n} rahā?*

---

[47] Probably closer to the Romanian gesture, but more unorthodox, to give someone the finger, to flip someone off: उँगली दिखाना/उठाना *u^{n}glī dikhānā/uṭhānā* (lit. to show the finger, in Hindi not necessarily disrespectfully, but pointing out the culprit).

[48] Other verbs like *samjhānā*, to explain, can be used.

44. a bate pe umăr = to pat on the shoulder (to encourage, to console, to attract attention)

थपथपाना *thapthapānā* (lit. to pat)

Profesorul l-**a bătut** cu drag **pe umăr** pe student și l-a lăudat.

The teacher **patted** the student **on** his **shoulder** lovingly and praised him.

शिक्षक ने छात्र के **कंधे पर** प्यार से **थपथपाया** और शाबाशी दी।

*Śikṣak ne chātra ke **ka^{n}dhe par** pyār se **thapthapāyā** aur śābāśī dī.*

45. a-și bate picioarele = to walk a lot, to walk high and low

पैर दौड़ाना *pair dauṛānā* (lit. to make the feet run)

Și-a **bătut picioarele** prin multe locuri până să găsească locul acesta.

He has **walked high and low** to find this place.

इस जगह को ढूँढने तक उसने बहुत जगहों में **पैर दौड़ाए।**

*Is jagah ko ḍhū^{n}ḍhne tak usne bahut jagaho^{n} me^{n} **pair dauṛāe**.*

46. a bate (pasul) pe loc = not to progress, advance in a situation or problem

उसी मुक़ाम पर खड़ा होना *usī mukām par khaṛā honā* (lit. to stand at the same point)

आगे नहीं बढ़ पाना *āge nahī^{n} baḍh pānā* (lit. not be able to advance)

बहुत समय लगना *bahut samay lagnā* (lit. to take a long time)

Încerc să atrag cât mai multă lume către acest domeniu, dar simt că **bat pasul pe loc** de-o veșnicie.

I am trying to attract as many people towards this field as possible, but it feels like it is **taking forever/there has been no progress**.

मैं इस क्षेत्र की ओर और लोगों को आकर्षित करना चाहती हूँ, पर मुझे लगता है जैसे अरसों से **उसी मुक़ाम पर खड़ी हूँ / आगे नहीं बढ़ पा रही।**

Mai^n is kṣetra kī or aur logo^n ko ākarṣit karnā cāhtī hū^n, par mujhe lagtā hai jaise arso^n se ***usī mukām par khaṛī hū^n / āge nahī^n baḍh pā rahī****.*

F. Miscellaneous Station

47. a bate pe cineva = to beat someone, to defeat, vanquish someone in a game, in a battle

हराना *harānā* (lit. to defeat)

Românii i-au bătut pe turci în ultima bătălie.

The Romanians **beat/defeated** the Turks in the last battle.

अंतिम लड़ाई में, रोमानियन लोगों ने तुर्कों को **हराया**।

A^{n}tim laṛāī me^n, romāniyan logo^n ne turko^n ko ***harāyā****.*

L-a bătut la șah.

He **beat** him at chess.

उसने उसको शतरंज में **हराया**।

Usne usko śatra^{n}j me^n ***harāyā.***

48. a se bate pentru ceva = to fight for something; to wish for something very intently

लड़ना *laṛnā* (lit. to fight)

În ultima etapă a competiției, cele două **se vor bate** pentru marele premiu de 100.000 de euro.

In the last stage of the competition, the two **will be fighting** for the grand prize of 100.000 euros.

प्रतियोगिता के अंतिम चरण में, दोनों एक लाख यूरो के भव्य पुरस्कार के लिए **लड़ेंगी**।

Pratiyogitā ke a^{n}tim caraṇ me^n, dono^n ek lākh yūro ke bhavya puraskār ke lie ***laṛe^{n}gī****.*

49. a bate (pe cineva) măr = to beat someone to a pulp; **a bate (pe cineva) de-i merg/ sar fulgii/untul** = to beat someone up to a pulp, to knock someone's head off

बुरी तरह पीटना *burī tarah pīṭnā* (lit. to beat up really badly)

भुरता निकालना/क़ीमा बनाना *bhurtā nikālnā/kīmā banānā* (lit. to mash, to finely chop meat, to make minced meat)

Fiindcă făcea scandal pentru că era beat, bărbatul **a fost bătut măr** de vecini până la venirea poliției.

As he was causing a scandal because he was drunk, the man was **badly beaten/beaten to a pulp** by the neighbours until the arrival of the police.

क्योंकि नशे में होने के कारण हंगामा मचा रहा था, पुलिस के आने तक पड़ोसियों ने आदमी को **बुरी तरह से पीटा/का क़ीमा बना दिया।**

Kyo^{n}ki naśe me^n hone ke kāraṇ ha^{n}gāmā macā rahā thā, pulis ke āne tak paṛosiyo^n ne ādmī ko ***burī tarah se pīṭā/kā kīmā banā diyā*****.**

Ajuns în pușcărie, deținuții **l-au bătut** pe violatorul de copii **de i-au sărit fulgii**.

Once in prison, the inmates **beat** the child rapist **to a pulp**.

कारागृह पहुँचते (ही), क़ैदियों ने बाल बलात्कारी का **भुरता निकाला।**

Kārāgṛh pahu^{n}cte (hī), kaidiyo^n ne bāl balātkārī kā ***bhurtā nikālā*****.**

50. a bate (pe cineva) cu propriile lui arme = to play someone at his own game, to give someone a dose of his own medicine

(उसके) हथियारों से हराना *(uske) hathiyāro^n se harānā*

(lit. to defeat with his/her own weapons)

Dacă se încăpățânează, trebuie să găsim o cale prin care să-l **batem cu propriile lui arme**.

If he is stubborn, we must find a way to **beat him with his own weapons/to play him at his own game**.

अगर ज़िद्दी रहेगा, तो हमें उसे **उसके** ही **हथियारों से हराने** का तरीका ढूंढना पड़ेगा।

Agar ziddī rahegā, to hame^{n} *use* ***uske*** *hī* ***hathiyāron se harāne*** *kā tarīkā ḍhū*^{n}*ḍhnā paṛegā.*

51. a bate în retragere = to beat retreat; to retract one's words

पीछे हटना *pīche haṭnā* (lit. to move back)

Văzând curajul ostașilor, dușmanii **au bătut în retragere**.

Seeing the courage of the soldiers, the enemies **retreated**.

जवानों का साहस देखकर, दुश्मन **पीछे हट गए।**

Javāno^{n} *kā sāhas dekhkar, duśman* ***pīche haṭ gae***.

După ce i s-au explicat consecințele faptelor sale, acesta **a bătut în retragere**.

After the consequences of his deeds were explained to him, he **retracted** (his words).

जब उसके कार्यों के परिणाम समझाए गए, वह **पीछे हट गया**[49]।

Jab uske kāryo^{n} *ke pariṇām samajhāe gae, vah* ***pīche haṭ gayā***.

52. a bate un record = to beat/break a record (usually in sports)

तोड़ना (+/- देना) *toṛnā (+/- denā)* (lit. to break)

Fiica mea **a bătut recordul** mondial pentru cel mai rapid și frumos scris de mână.

My daughter **broke the** world **record** for the fastest and prettiest handwriting.

मेरी बेटी ने सबसे तेज़ और सुन्दर हस्तलिपि का विश्व **रिकॉर्ड तोड़ दिया।**

---

[49] Alternatively, वापस लेना *vāpas lenā* (lit. to take back) to express retracting words.

Merī beṭī ne sabse tez aur su^{n}dar hastlipi kā viśva ***rikārḍ toḍ diyā****.*

53. a bate (cu ciocanul) = (about metals) to rhythmically hit metals in order to shape them, to pound

पीटना *pīṭnā* (lit. to beat); कूटना *kūṭnā* (lit. to pound, to beat, to thrash)

Pentru a-i da formă obiectului, trebuie întâi **să-l bată** douăzeci de minute cu ciocanul.

To give the object its shape, he must first **pound it** with the hammer for twenty minutes.

वस्तु को आकार देने के लिए, सबसे पहले उसको बीस मिनट तक हथौड़े से **पीटना/कूटना** होगा।

Vastu ko ākār dene ke lie, sabse pahle usko bīs minaṭ tak hathauṛe se ***pīṭnā/kūṭnā*** *hogā.*

Nu te lăsa, **bate fierul cât / până-i cald**.

Do not give up, **strike the iron while it's hot/no rest for the weary**.

हार मत मानो, जब तक गर्म हो लोहा **पीटते/कूटते रहो** (तब तक लोहा **पीटो** जब तक गर्म न हो जाए)।

Hār mat māno, jab tak garm ho lohā ***pīṭte/kūṭte raho*** *(tab tak lohā* ***pīṭo*** *jab tak garm na ho jāe).*

54. a bate bani/monedă = to mint a coin

सिक्का/मुद्रा ढालना/चलाना *sikkā/mudrā ḍhālnā/calānā* (lit. to mint/to put a coin in use)

De îndată ce a urcat pe tron, regele **a bătut** o nouă **monedă**.

As soon as the king ascended the throne, he **minted** a new coin.

सिंहासन पर चढ़ते/बैठते ही, राजा ने एक नया **सिक्का ढाला/चलाया**।

Si^{n}hāsan par caṛhte/baiṭhte hī, rājā ne ek nayā ***sikkā ḍhālā/calāyā****.*

- **a bate monedă pe ceva** = to insist upon something

  समय देना *samay denā* (lit. to give time)

  बात पर अड़ना/अड़े रहना/टिकना *bāt par aṛnā/aṛe rahnā/ṭiknā*

  (lit. to be obstinate and remain discussing the same topic)

  बात को दोहराना *bāt ko doharānā* (lit. to repeat the topic)

Nu mai vreau **să bat moneda** pe aceeași problemă; este evident că situația nu se va schimba.

I do not want to **spend more time** on the same problem; it is obvious that the situation shall not change.

मैं एक ही समस्या पर/को ज़्यादा **समय** नहीं **बिताना/देना** चाहती; स्पष्ट है कि स्थिति नहीं बदलेगी।

Mai^n ek hī samasyā par/ko zyādā ***samay*** *nahī^n* ***bitānā/denā*** *cāhtī; spaṣṭ hai ki sthiti nahī^n badlegī.*

55. a bate toba = to beat the drum, to reveal a secret or to be boastful

ढिंढोरा पीटना *ḍhi^{n}ḍhorā pīṭnā* (lit. to beat the drum)

Cum **să bați toba** că este însărcinată când femeia nu a apucat să le spună părinților?

How could you **reveal** that she is pregnant when the woman did not have time to tell her parents?

कोई कैसे **ढिंढोरा पीटे** कि वह गर्भवती है जब महिला के पास अपने माता-पिता को बताने के लिए समय नहीं था?

Koī kaise ***ḍhinḍhorā pīṭe*** *ki vah garbhvatī hai jab mahilā ke pās apne mātā-pitā ko batāne ke lie samay nahī^n thā?*

56. a bate tactul/măsura = to beat/keep the rhythm

ताल देना *tāl denā* (lit. to give rhythm)

Profesoara de muzică **bate tactul** în clasă.

The music teacher **is keeping the rhythm/beating time** in class.

संगीत शिक्षिका कक्षा में **ताल दे रही है।**

Sa^{n}gīt śikṣikā kakṣā me^n ***tāl de rahī hai.***

57. a bate un apropo/apropouri = to insinuate, to allude to something (usually, in a critical manner)

इशारा/इंगित करना *iśārā/i^{n}git karnā* (lit. to hint towards something)

Nu mai **bate apropouri**, tot nu-ți dau bani să ieși cu prietenii.

Stop **dropping hints**, I will not give you money to go out with friends.

इशारा करना बंद करो, मैं वैसे भी तुम्हें दोस्तों से बाहर जाने के लिए पैसे नहीं दे रही।

Iśārā karnā *ba^{n}d karo, mai^n vaise bhī tumhe^n dosto^n se bāhar jāne ke lie paise nahī^n de rahī.*

- **a bate vorba/cu vorba** = ibidem

Abia după ce s-a petrecut accidentul mi-am dat seama unde **bătea cu vorba**.

Only after the accident happened did I understand where he **was hinting at**.

दुर्घटना होने के बाद समझ गई किस तरफ़ **इशारा कर रहा था।**

Durghaṭnā hone ke bād samajh gaī kis taraf ***iśārā kar rahā thā.***

58. a bate mult drum/cale (+/- lung/ă) = to travel a lot, to walk a lot to reach a destination

पार/तय करना *pār/tay karnā* (lit. to cross, to cover a distance)

Prințul **a bătut cale lungă** până să ajungă la palat.

The prince **has come a long way** to reach the palace.

महल तक पहुँचने के लिए राजकुमार ने एक लंबा रास्ता **पार/तय किया।**

Mahal tak pahu^{n}cne ke lie rājkumār ne ek la^{m}bā rāstā ***pār/tay kiyā****.*

59. a bate drumul/drumurile (căile, ulițele, țările, codrii) = to walk a lot, to wander, to run

फिरना *phirnā* (lit. to wander, to travel); टहलना *ṭahalnā* (lit. to go for a walk); घूमना *ghūmnā* (lit. to have a walk); नापना *nāpnā* (lit. to measure, to wander about); भ्रमण करना *bhramaṇ karnā* (lit. to visit, to tour, to travel)

A **bătut** multe **țări** străine până să se stabilească în Suedia.

He **wandered in** many foreign **countries** until he settled in Sweden.

स्वीडन में बसने तक उसने (वह) कई विदेशी देशों का/में **भ्रमण किया/टहला/घूमा/फिरा।**

Svīḍan me^{n} basne tak usne (vah) kaī videśī deśo^{n} kā/me^{n} ***bhramaṇ kiyā/ṭahalā/ghūmā/phirā****.*

- **cale bătută!** = (expr.) good riddance

छुटकारा मिलना/पाना[50] *chuṭkārā milnā/pānā* (lit. to rid oneself of something)

Drum bun[51] și **cale bătută**! Farewell and **good riddance**!

---

[50] This is the only verb expressing happiness upon someone's leaving that we are aware of being used in common speech, even if under the breath. We have not yet come across a verb or expression that expresses joy upon someone leaving to the extent of Romanian or English – with such openness. As it can be observed, the structure of Hindi requires the usage of a full verbal construction, contrasting to Romanian and English – noun structure.

[51] In this context, Romanian hints to a permanent – or, at least, a semi-permanent – riddance of someone, not to be understood as wishing someone a safe trip.

अलविदा! **छुटकारा** तो **मिला**! *Alvidā! **Chuṭkārā** to **milā**!*

- **drum bătătorit** = well-trodden path, a familiar way, path
  परिचित/घिसा-पिटा रास्ता *paricit/ghisā-piṭā rāstā*

  (lit. familiar, well-known/overused, uninteresting)
  Să aleagă **drumul bătătorit** sau să riște?
  Should she choose the **well-trodden path** or risk it?
  परिचित/घिसे-पिटे रास्ते को चुने या जोखिम उठाए?

  ***Parichit/ghise-piṭe rāste** ko cune yā jokhim uthāe?*

60. a bate câmpii = to ramble, to beat about the bush, to practice evasion, not to stick to the disscussion topic or to speak nonsense

टाल-मटोल करना / झख मारना

(lit. to babble, to have incoherent, foolish speech)

De fiecare dată când i se cere o explicație legată de întârzierea la muncă, **bate câmpii**.

Each time he is asked for an explanation related to being late for work, he **rambles/beats about the bush**.

हर बार जब उससे काम पे देर से आने के संबंध में स्पष्टीकरण माँगा जाता है, तो वह **टाल-मटोल करने/झख मारने** लगता है।

*Har bār jab use kām pe der se āne ke sa^{m}ba^{n}dh me^{n} spaṣṭīkaraṇ mā^{n}gā jātā hai, to vah **ṭāl-maṭol karne/jhakh mārne** lagtā hai.*

61. a bate din aripi/coadă[52] = to flap/flutter the wings (for birds), to wag the tail (for other animals, eg. dogs)

पंख फड़फड़ाना *pa^{n}kh phaṛphaṛānā* (lit. to flap the wings);

पूँछ/दुम हिलाना *pū^{n}ch/dum hilānā* (lit. to move/wag the tail)

---

[52] In our native region of Romania, *a da din aripi/coadă* is more frequent.

Privighetoarea **bate** puternic **din aripi** la nici o săptămână de la accident.

The nightingale **is** strongly **beating/flapping its wings** not even a week after the accident.

दुर्घटना के न एक भी हफ़्ते बाद, बुलबुल अपने **पंख** ज़ोर से **फड़फड़ा रही है**।

Durghaṭnā ke na ek bhī hafte bād, bulbul apne ***pa***^{n}***kh*** *zor se* ***phaṛphaṛā rahī hai****.*

Uite cu câtă bucurie **bate** cățelul **din coadă**!

Look how happily the dog **is wagging its tail**!

देखो कितनी ख़ुशी से कुत्ता अपनी **पूँछ हिला रहा है**!

Dekho kitnī khuśī se kuttā apnī ***pū***^{n}***ch hilā rahā hai****!*

62. a bate pe cineva norocul/hazul/pustia/cucul/vina etc.[53] = expresses the sympathy, awe, shock etc. of someone towards the interlocutor

तेरी तो... *terī to...* (lit. your...); ओह तेरी... *oh terī...*(lit. oh, your...); हे भगवान *he Bhagvān* (lit. oh God / Lord)

Bată-te norocul, ce m-ai speriat!
तेरी तो... तुमने मुझे डरा दिया!

Bless you, you scared me!
Terī to... *tumne mujhe ḍarā diyā!*

- **să mă bată Dumnezeu**[54] = expression to emphasize the believable, trust-worthy nature of the utterer

[53] It is to be noted that this formulation is quite unique to Romanian; especially for Hindi, one needs to build an entire phrase (in its full or implied form) to convey what Romanian is able to achieve in two words – these few words bearing the weigh of all grammatical elements of a complete sentence, both structurally and semantically.

दंड/सज़ा देना *da^{n}ḍ/sazā denā* (lit. to give punishment)

Să mă bată Dumnezeu dacă te mint!
May God punish me if I am lying to you!
ईश्वर मुझे **दंड दे** अगर मैं झूठ बोल रहा हूँ!

Īśvar *mujhe* ***da^{n}ḍ de*** *agar mai^{n} jhūṭh bol rahā hū^{n}!*

- **a bate (de) Dumnezeu/ sfinți** = to be punished, to wish for someone to be punished

Dumnezeu l-a bătut pentru ceea ce a făcut.
God punished him for what he did.
ईश्वर ने उसको अपने किए की **सज़ा दी**।

Īśvar ne *usko apne kie kī* ***sazā dī.***

63. a bate la mașină = to type (on a typewriter)
टाइप करना *ṭāip karnā* (lit. to type)

Pe vremuri, totul **se bătea la mașină** pentru că nu existau computere.
In the past, everything **was typed** (on a typewriter) as there were no computers.
पुराने ज़माने में, सब कुछ (टंकण-यंत्र पर) **टाइप किया जाता था** क्योंकि कंप्यूटर नहीं थे।

Purāne zamāne me^{n}, sab kuch (ṭa^{n}kaṇ-yantra par) ***ṭāip kiyā jātā thā*** *kyo^{n}ki ka^{m}pyūṭar nahī^{n} the.*

64. a bate (în) = (for colours) to have a certain nuance, tinge or hue

[54] Usually a fixed expression, it is quite culturally specific. It is interesting to note that it is used when the utterer wants to convince someone of his/her sincere and good intentions by invoking the wrath of God if he/she uttered an untruth. There is always an *if* involved, *may God punish me if...* (eg. I am lying, I wish you ill, I say it out of spite etc.) – expressed or implied.

आभा होना *ābhā honā* (lit. to have a tinge, nuance); झलक दिखना *jhalak dikhnā* (lit. a tinge or glimpse to be seen)

Aveți un păr negru splendid care **bate în** albastru.

You have splendid black hair that has a blue **tinge**.

आपके काले बाल बहुत सुन्दर हैं जिनमें नीली **आभा है**/नीले (रंग) की **झलक दिखती है।**

*Āpke kāle bāl bahut su^{n}dar hai^{n} jinme^{n} nīlī **ābhā hai**/nīle (ra^{n}g) kī **jhalak dikhtī hai**.*

65. a bate = (about engines and other such mechanics) to work faultily, to emit an odd sound while working; (about arms and guns) to shoot until a particular distance, to rattle

खड़खड़ाना *khaṛkhaṛānā* (lit. to clatter, to rattle, to make noise)

गोली चलना/चलाना *golī calnā/calānā* (lit. to fire a bullet)

Eram pe drum spre mare când motorul a început **să bată** destul de puternic.

We were on our way to the seaside when the engine **started rattling** quite strongly.

हम समुद्र की ओर जा रहे थे जब इंजन काफ़ी ज़ोर से **खड़खड़ाने** लगा।

*Ham samudra kī or jā rahe the jab i^{n}jan kāfī zor se **khaṛkhaṛāne** lagā.*

Pușca bunicului nu mai **bătea** decât la 100 de pași.

The grandfather's **gun was** only **firing** at a distance of 100 feet.

दादाजी की बंदूक से सिर्फ़ सौ क़दम की दूरी पर **गोली चलती थी**।

*Dādājī kī ba^{n}dūk se sirf sau kadam kī dūrī par **golī caltī thī**.*

/दादाजी की बंदूक सिर्फ़ सौ क़दम की दूरी पर **गोली चलाती थी**।

*Dādājī kī ba^{n}dūk sirf sau kadam kī dūrī par **golī calātī thī**.*

Conclusion

To sum up, it is quite surprising how many new meanings the verb *a bate* (to beat, to fight etc.) yields in Romanian, not adding the plethora of available expressions or sayings that contain another part of speech derived from the main verb. No less interesting is what the internet and its users can compile, linguistically inspiring the minds of those thirsty for comparison and knowledge. Both English and Hindi have some great correspondences for some examples, as well as less fortunate variants for others.

Regardless of how well-versed one is in matters of linguistics and semantics, the popular usage bears a heavy influence on oral interactions, or in the spirit of the paper, „*viața bate filmul*” (*life beats film/fiction*) – that is, on a lighter note, the flow of life and people dictate the changes in language as well; we may agree with some changes, while others might appall us, but the truth of the matter is that life wins over fiction and theory. It is in our best interest to analyze and ruminate upon the intricacies and colours of language, else our existence be condemned to bleakness and blandness. Let us forever remember that language is as fluid as the only constant in ontology: *change*.

References:

https://anonimus.ro/2021/08/minunata-limba-romana-si-curiozitatile-ei-bataia-la-romani/

https://www.argesexpres.ro/index.php/cultura/37708-la-curtea-lui-urmuz-bataia-la-romani

https://www.facebook.com/100064574717082/posts/1487377251453359/;

https://www.facebook.com/1DudumanMariana/posts/limba-noastr%C4%83-i-ocomoar%C4%83-%EF%B8%8Fpreluata-poporul-roman-un-poporde-batausi-%C3%AEn-limba-ro/3468340709940644/

https://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/stiri/de-ce-iubesc-romanii-bataia-viral-pe-retelele-de-socializare--285304.html

Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary, ed. R.S. McGregor, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Online dictionaries:

www.context.reverso.net
www.dexonline.ro
www.shabdkosh.com
www.thesaurus.com
www.hallo.ro

About the author: After having completed a B.A. in Philology, with the major in English and minor in Hindi, **Hilda-Hedvig Varga** went on to finish her Master's degree in Religious Studies. She holds a PhD in Philosophy, with a thesis on Hindu rites of passage that she published in 2020 (*Sa^{m}skāra – rituri de trecere în hinduism*, Ed. Lumen, Iași, 2020, ISBN: 978-973-166-561-0). In 2021, she published the only grammar book dedicated to Hindi in Romania (*Gramatica limbii hindi*, Ed. Lumen, Iași, 2021, ISBN 978-973-166-591-7). A year later, she published the only course book of Hindi for beginners written by a Romanian (*Manual de limba hindi*, vol. 1, începători, Ed. Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2022, ISBN: 978-606-17-2023-1). Her interests are mainly focused on Hindi language and literature, Indian culture and philosophy, having published several papers in this respect.

Contact: hedwig0silver@gmail.com

Metaphors of Liberation: Exploring the Imagistic Techniques and Visual Language in Tagore's *Chandalika*

Poulami ROY
Department of English
Netaji Nagar College, Kolkata, India

Abstract: Rabindranath Tagore's dramatic techniques employ a rich tapestry of symbolic language, where imagery serves as a vehicle for both narrative progression and the expression of complex social critiques. Set against the backdrop of rigid caste hierarchies prevalent in society, the play presents the transformative journey of *Prakriti*, an untouchable woman who confronts the deeply ingrained social prejudices of her time. Through its poetic language and richly layered imagery, *Chandalika* goes beyond a mere narrative of social critique to become a profound meditation on human dignity, identity, and freedom. Through a detailed analysis of these imagistic elements, this study highlights how Tagore's visual language not only enriches the dramatic experience but also invites a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural issues addressed in the play. The paper argues that *Chandalika* serves as a powerful example of how metaphors of liberation, when intertwined with visual symbolism, can transcend the constraints of conventional drama to deliver a potent message of human dignity and self-worth.

Keywords: Narrative Tool, Symbolic Expression, Rabindranath Tagore, Dramatic Vision.

Motto:

"I am human. Not to be slighted and despised,
but to be loved and respected."[1]

Human experience in art can always be depicted through two distinct approaches: realism and symbolism. In the realm of drama, this duality translates to two different methods of representation. The realist approach brings the experience to life directly, through tangible, flesh-and-blood characters and concrete situations. On the other hand, the symbolic approach conveys deeper meanings and emotions indirectly, using evocative images and metaphors to suggest ideas and themes beyond the literal narrative. Realism grounds the audience in the immediacy of the moment, providing a mirror to society by portraying characters and events that are authentic and relatable. Symbolism, however, invites viewers to look beyond the surface, to interpret and find meaning in the layers of imagery, allegory, and metaphor. While realism focuses on the external realities of life, symbolism delves into the internal, often mystical, dimensions of the human psyche, allowing for a more profound engagement with universal truths.

Both approaches serve different but complementary purposes in drama. Realism appeals to the intellect by presenting situations that demand critical engagement, whereas symbolism appeals to the imagination and emotions, inviting the audience to explore abstract concepts and deeper philosophical reflections. In combining these two methods, dramatists can create works that are both grounded in reality and rich with deeper, metaphorical significance, capturing the full spectrum of human experience.

---

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, *Chandalika* in Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Plays*, Translated by K.R. Kripalani, Sahitya Akademi, 2002.

In Rabindranath Tagore's *Chandalika*, the protagonist's journey from subjugation to self-realization is intricately tied to Tagore's use of nature, colour, and spiritual metaphors, which underscore the play's exploration of identity, caste, and the human soul's quest for freedom. Tagore's use of imagistic techniques and visual language in *Chandalika* is central to its thematic impact. From the symbolic resonance of water, which signifies both purification and rebellion, to the use of light and shadow to reflect psychological and spiritual conflicts, Tagore's visual symbolism deepens the narrative's emotional and philosophical dimensions. This visual language not only enhances the dramatic tension of the play but also serves as a vehicle for a broader commentary on the themes of freedom and resistance against entrenched social hierarchies.

Tagore deliberately employs these imagistic techniques to challenge normative perceptions of caste and identity, offering a vision of liberation that transcends conventional social boundaries. In doing so, the play invites a reevaluation of Tagore's dramatic work, highlighting his innovative use of visual elements to critique social injustices and promote a more inclusive and humane worldview.

Imagery of Liberation:
Navigating through Prakriti's quest for freedom

Chandalika stands as a compelling exploration of social inequality, spiritual awakening, and the quest for liberation. Set against the backdrop of rigid caste hierarchies of the society, the play presents the transformative journey of Prakriti, an untouchable woman who confronts the deeply ingrained social prejudices of her time. Through its poetic language and richly layered imagery, *Chandalika* goes beyond a mere narrative of social critique to become a profound meditation on human dignity, identity, and freedom. In *Chandalika*, Tagore employs a variety of imagistic techniques and visual symbols – such as water, flowers, and

light – to construct metaphors that convey Prakriti's internal struggle and evolution from self-loathing to self-awareness. The recurring motifs and metaphors in the play serve as powerful vehicles for expressing the universal longing for liberation, not just from societal constraints but also from the psychological and spiritual bondage that accompanies them. This use of imagery is crucial to understanding how Tagore communicates his vision of a world where human connections transcend social divisions and where the quest for spiritual and social freedom is inseparable.

Rooted in an ancient Buddhist legend, Rabindranath Tagore's *Chandalika* unfolds the poignant story of Prakriti, a young girl who finds herself profoundly moved when Ananda, a revered disciple of the Buddha, asks her for a drink of water at the village well. Despite her initial hesitation and warnings about her low caste, Ananda dismisses her concerns with his powerful words. He strongly says that she should not humiliate herself, as self-humiliation is a sin that is worse than self-murder. These words resonate deeply within Prakriti, igniting a transformation in her perception of herself and her place in the world. As Prakriti's understanding of herself begins to evolve, she is caught between the wisdom of her mother, who warns her against overstepping societal boundaries, and her own burgeoning desire for Ananda.

What begins as an overwhelming gesture of gratitude towards the enlightened monk, gradually deepens into a longing, a desire fueled by her awakening consciousness. Encouraged by Ananda's unexpected kindness, Prakriti begins to experience a newfound sense of self-worth and identity, which begins to blossom, challenging the societal norms that have long dictated her life. Yet, her mother warns her against nurturing such dangerous thoughts that challenge the rigid caste boundaries. Prakriti's awakening becomes not only a personal quest for self-affirmation but also a profound exploration of human desire,

spiritual longing, and the struggle against social oppression. Through Prakriti's journey, the play captures the complexities of love, liberation, and the defiance of deeply entrenched societal prejudices.

The various stages of Prakriti's longing for the holy monk, Ananda, are vividly portrayed through a series of striking images that convey her shifting psychological state. Consumed by a desperate desire, she implores her mother to use magic to bind the monk's thoughts and compel him to come to her. As her mother's incantations take effect, Ananda is irresistibly drawn towards Prakriti's hut, dragged across great distances, enduring profound torment.

In a moment of intense realization, Prakriti witnesses the transformation of Ananda's calm, serene face into one of anguish and pain, reflected in an enchanted mirror. This sight triggers a profound internal conflict within her – her yearning for his presence is overshadowed by a growing sense of empathy and pity for his suffering. Torn between her desires and her compassion, she ultimately reaches a point of spiritual awakening. When the spell-forced monk finally appears at her hut, Prakriti is overcome with remorse. She shatters the magical instruments that had bound him, symbolically breaking free from her own desires. Falling at his feet, she begs for his forgiveness, recognizing the gravity of her actions. In this moment of surrender, Prakriti's journey transcends mere personal longing to become a profound act of spiritual liberation, reflecting the deeper themes of redemption, humility, and the quest for inner freedom.

Tagore masterfully uses the image of a flower to encapsulate Prakriti's emotions – no matter how beautiful; a flower from a poisonous plant is always rejected. This metaphor reflects Prakriti's profound sense of rejection and invisibility due to her caste. She has always felt marginalized and unseen in the presence of higher-caste individuals. Her disbelief deepens when she realizes that even her modest service has

been acknowledged by Ananda, a monk of great nobility. For Prakriti, who has always perceived herself as being unworthy of recognition, her identity has been overshadowed by the stigma of her caste, her humanity overlooked. She has been treated not as a person, but as an object of desire, valued only for her physical form. Yet, Ananda's recognition of her transcends this superficial perception.

Ananda sees beyond her societal label, acknowledging the intrinsic beauty and humanity within her. This acknowledgment by Ananda shifts Prakriti's self-perception and opens the door to a deeper understanding of her own dignity and value. This recognition of her fundamental humanity challenges and reshapes her self-perception, offering a profound commentary on the themes of identity, acceptance, and the quest for true recognition beyond societal barriers. This profound acknowledgment by Ananda represents a pivotal moment in Prakriti's self-realization and liberation, underscoring Tagore's critique of social hierarchies, the quest for true recognition beyond societal barriers and his advocacy for recognizing the inherent dignity in every individual.

Tagore's Theatrical Poetics: The Intersection of Symbolism and Social Critique

In *Chandalika*, Tagore portrays the protagonist, Prakriti, as a powerful symbol of the Adamic Fall and the subsequent journey toward redemption. Prakriti's journey is from self-deprecation to self-realization, where the initial state of ignorance and subjugation transforms into an awakening of consciousness and the pursuit of spiritual liberation. The image of the barren wasteland serves as a powerful metaphor for Prakriti's inner spiritual desolation. Her life, much like an arid, waterless expanse, lacks vitality and purpose, yearning for the "water of life" – a recognition of her inherent worth and humanity. This recognition comes from Ananda, who, by simply asking

her for a drink of water, acknowledges her existence and dignity, providing her with a profound sense of spiritual salvation. Without this moment of recognition, Prakriti's spirit remains lifeless, unproductive, and empty, akin to a desolate desert.

Tagore employs the symbol of water with deep and unique significance. For Prakriti, the untouchable girl, the monk Ananda's simple request – "give me water" becomes a profound moment of revelation. As she ecstatically recalls these three words, she feels liberated from the oppressive caste restrictions that have bound her all her life. The phrase "give me water," repeated throughout the play, transcends its literal meaning, taking on a symbolic resonance that represents spiritual cleansing, liberation, and the breaking of social barriers. However, this symbolism takes a darker turn when Ananda, later on, passes by the well without acknowledging her.

The absence of his words, now serves as a painful reminder of her unfulfilled longing and unacknowledged existence. In her anguish, Prakriti laments to her mother about the monk Ananda's indifference, that feels like a deep betrayal to Prakriti, who had believed herself to be spiritually reborn through his earlier act of kindness. This perceived slight from Ananda not only deepens her emotional turmoil but also becomes the catalyst for the central dramatic conflict of the play. Driven by a mixture of pain, indignation, and desire for acknowledgment, Prakriti compels her mother to perform witchcraft against the monk. Through this act, water shifts from a symbol of spiritual liberation to one of emotional vengeance, capturing the complex interplay of human emotions, spiritual yearnings, and societal constraints in the narrative. Tagore thus uses water to explore the themes of longing, transformation, and the struggle for recognition in a deeply divided society.

Chandalika is interwoven with a series of deeply symbolic songs that enrich its thematic complexity. These songs convey a range of

metaphors: the life-giving essence of water, the torment of unbearable thirst, the flower that finds purpose in worship, the spiritual call from beyond, the mark of a cherished one, the grace of complete forgiveness, the tumultuous union of opposing forces, and the all-encompassing sorrow that accompanies profound transformation. Each of these elements contributes to a larger spiritual and emotional tapestry, reflecting Prakriti's evolving consciousness and inner turmoil.

One of the most powerful songs in the play is Prakriti's ecstatic vision of Rudra, the god of destruction, which emerges through the intense suffering and pain she feels. This song captures her spiritual and emotional entanglement with Ananda's moral anguish, drawing her into the depths of transformative sorrow. Through these verses, Prakriti imagines the forces of destruction and renewal in a cosmic dance, suggesting the dissolution of old identities and the regeneration of new possibilities. These songs are not merely lyrical interludes but are integral to the play's narrative structure. They serve as a vehicle for expressing Prakriti's inner journey from despair to spiritual awakening, reflecting the complex emotional and metaphysical landscape of her existence. Through these songs, Rabindranath Tagore weaves a tapestry of symbols that convey the profound themes of liberation, suffering, and the cyclical nature of creation and destruction, all of which are central to the play's exploration of human experience.

Prakriti, who has always felt invisible and insignificant under the oppressive gaze of the higher caste, finds herself overwhelmed by disbelief and wonder when Ananda, a revered monk and the noblest of all, accepts her service without hesitation or prejudice. His simple act becomes a monumental event for Prakriti, breaking the chains of her self-imposed invisibility and igniting a spark of self-worth and identity that defies the rigid social norms of her time. Through this moment, Tagore not only portrays Prakriti's personal awakening but also critiques

the dehumanizing effects of caste-based discrimination, illustrating how a single act of compassion can transform a barren spiritual landscape into one of possibility and growth. Prakriti's transformation extends beyond a mere acknowledgment of human universality. She comes to understand that achieving purity akin to Ananda's requires more than recognizing shared human traits; it necessitates a profound inner purification. To attain such purity, she must eliminate all impure thoughts and emotions that could taint her spiritual essence.

This realization underscores a deeper journey of self-purification and spiritual awakening, where the process of cleansing is as much about inner moral and emotional refinement as it is about aligning with the ideals of purity and sanctity exemplified by Ananda. In this way, Prakriti's quest for spiritual elevation becomes a rigorous and introspective path, leading her toward a state of true inner and outer purity.

Rabindranath Tagore weaves a complex tapestry of symbols – such as water, light, and nature – that resonate with themes of purification, enlightenment, and transformation. These imagistic techniques are not mere decorative elements but are integral to the play's exploration of liberation, both from societal constraints and from the internalized oppression that Prakriti experiences. The visual language employed by Tagore creates a dynamic interplay between the physical and metaphysical realms, reflecting the protagonist's evolving consciousness and her ultimate quest for dignity and freedom.

Through Prakriti, Tagore not only explores the deeply entrenched social injustices of caste and untouchability but also delves into the universal themes of sin, guilt, and redemption. Her struggle against the oppressive societal norms and her eventual quest for self-identity represent a broader commentary on the human condition, reflecting the potential for spiritual rebirth and transcendence beyond the constraints of

worldly existence. In this way, Prakriti becomes not just a character within a story but a timeless symbol of the human soul's capacity to rise above its fallen state and seek redemption.

References:

Bhattacharya, S. P. (2007). *Tagore's Dramatic World: Themes and Techniques*. Sahitya Akademi.

Choudhury, R. (2010). *Theatre and Society: Tagore's Vision*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Mukherjee, S. (1985). *The Dramas of Rabindranath Tagore*. Allied Publishers.

Naskar, C. (2003). *Tagore's Drama and the Spirit of Modern India*. Oxford University Press.

Sengupta, A. (1992). *Imagery in Tagore's plays*. Jnanada Prakashan.

Tagore, R. (1938). Chandalika. In *Three plays: Mukta-Dhara, Natir Puja, Chandalika* (M. Sykes, Trans.). Visva-Bharati Publishing Department.

About the author:

Poulami Roy currently works as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Netaji Nagar College (affiliated to University of Calcutta), West Bengal, India. Also, she completed her PhD from the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Her research focuses on the question of 'translatability' of a performance text. Her other thrust areas include: Performance Studies, Life and works of Rabindranath Tagore, Cultural Studies and Lyrics.

Contact: poulamiroy.eng@gmail.com.

The City beyond the Words.
A Personal Approach of Calcutta

Mihaela GLIGOR
Cluj Center for Indian Studies
Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca

Abstract: Calcutta (Kolkata) is usually considered the cultural capital of India. The extraordinary cultural effervescence of the city, the numerous descriptions of the metropolis in the literary writings, memoirs or films place Calcutta among the most inspirational cities in the world. I have visited Calcutta many times and I am always impressed by the city's ability to reassert itself, and to give a voice to all its residents. During festivals, the city is like a fairytale; it vibrates with people's lives and is part of the festivities. But during the rest of the year, Calcutta charms visitors and takes over their lives, making them return again and again. This is how I see, experience, love and read the city of joy, beyond the words in which it is often described.

Keywords: Calcutta, the cultural capital of India, personal approach, literature, importance of cultural representation.

Motto:

"I have much to tell you about Calcutta."
Wendy Doniger

"There is Kolkata, and there is the world."
Sudeep Chakravarti

Seen on TV, Calcutta seems unreal. Everything is green and tidy and so close, that you believe it is very easy to walk from Howrah Bridge to Tollygunje or from Kalighat to Esplanade. In one hour, while the documentary lasts, you see some of the most beautiful places of Calcutta, learn something about the Bengali cuisine, about the culture of the metropolis and the religions that coexist here in peace, and you are firmly convinced that you know everything there is to know about the city which has been, for years, the pearl of the British crown.

But only when you get there, you realize that nothing is what it seems in the city of over 15 million souls. Every corner pulsates with life and every place has its own story. At the beginning of February, it's already hot and the strong smells invade your senses: the combined smells of the street food, scented sticks from temples, exhaust fumes, dust, flowers or exotic fruits, heavy oily perfumes or the so pungent smell of the disinfectant thrown on the street. The noises come extra, from everywhere. Hundreds of cars or motorized rickshaws honking their horns obliviously, buses that stand to disintegrate under your gaze, policemen who whistle conscientiously, following rules only they know, women who gesture widely and chatter incessantly, children who scream and shout and run as if the street is just theirs, birds singing and trying to cover the noise of the street with their trills, huge crows screeching and dropping something from their beaks, devotional music or trendy international hits. You don't even get to figure out which one comes from where. You know that only late in the evening the noise of the city will cease and the silence of the night will be pierced only by the barking of the stray dogs.

And slowly you discover a Calcutta of thousands of faces and thousands of colors; with millions of miniature worlds hidden within its every resident; with thoughts, feelings, beliefs, dreams, ideals and, above all, the cruel reality. Every day, Calcutta takes over your life and gives

you a dose of well-seasoned reality, whether you're ready to receive it or not. The time does not exist in Calcutta. Actually, it means nothing. It's relative or optional. If you are in a hurry somewhere, you better forget it. It takes a whole day to cross Calcutta, and a few more to realize how complex this city is and how many incredible wonders you have seen.

Park Street is a modern Babel tower. All the nations of the world meet in this vibrant area with museums, bookstores, restaurants and hotels for all tastes and budgets, markets with everything, including more or less forgotten histories. Beyond Park Street and the Indian Museum, if you keep going forward on Jawaharlal Nehru Road, you reach Esplanade and New Market. It is perhaps the most effervescent area of modern Calcutta, the most multicultural and diverse in terms of religious beliefs, as here you can find, in a relatively small space, mosques, temples, synagogues and churches.

If you go beyond Chowringhee,[1] into the Esplanade area and further on, you find yourself at the crossroads of times. The mansions built by the British are, even today, as impressive as they were in their heyday. The famous Writers Building, once the imposing headquarters of the East India Company, today the local government, is one of Calcutta's most beautiful and emblematic buildings. But behind it, towards the Hoogly River and all the way to Howrah Bridge, is another Calcutta. In patched tents or directly on the cobblestones, several families live their lives from day to day. Such images are common in modern Calcutta. And everywhere you find stalls with *masala chai* or all kinds of specifically Bengali snacks and sweets, prepared right there, on the side

---

[1] Chowringhee (Chourangi) is the central area of Kolkata where the Europeans settled. The area is beautifully described in *Chowringhee*, a novel by Bengali author Sankar. First published in Bengali in 1962, the novel became a bestseller. See Sankar, *Chowringhee*, translated from the Bengali by Arunava Sinha, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2007.

of the road, from morning to night, in front of the customer. Enticing smells seduce even the most skeptical traveler.

The streets of Calcutta sum up all possible worlds. Colors, smells and noises are elements of everyday life and express the charm of the city. And the parallel worlds only increase the wonder of the one who arrives in the city of joy, as some call it. Nowhere in the world you feel more human than in Calcutta. Life and death always meet on the busy streets of Calcutta. On the sidewalk, under the already hot sun, among the hasty steps of passers-by, under the continuous blare of horns, a woman puts her baby to sleep on a faded towel. Not two meters from her, a car is taking the body of a man to the crematorium. The corpse is covered with wonderful white, fragrant flowers. At the stall on the corner, colored powders for Holi are already on sale, and across the road, as if watched over by the sobriety and impressive architecture of the famous Marble Palace, a man takes his daily ritual bath. The differences are huge, and they are at every step.

Calcutta is the Indian city with the most pronounced class differences. And only here the street, with its endless spectacle, brings out feelings you didn't even know you had. In front of you stands a woman who cooks on the sidewalk all day long. She smiles warmly at you and feeds you with the hot *samosa*. A child, carrying his dusty schoolbag with infinite care, passes by you in a hurry. The fruit sellers smile at you too. The jewelers string the colored beads according to a pattern known only to them. Further on there are some people washing clothes or ironing. Among the cars that are always honking are those who pull the rickshaws. At the small temples on every street corner, priests light sticks and ring bells. Pious women stop and worship. Cops are frantically directing out-of-control traffic. Street vendors tout their wares. In the meat market, goats and chickens await their deaths. Each has its role and purpose. Nothing is too much. Nothing is too little.

Everything is as it always was, and as it should be. The laws of Karma go on, endlessly. There is certain poetry on the streets of this city. And when it's time to leave Calcutta, you smile, somehow confused. You don't really know what you feel, really. You just know that one day you will be back. And your story will continue exactly from where you left it.

Locals or foreigners, many writers were mesmerized by the stories of Calcutta. Krishna Dutta, born and raised in Calcutta, depicts the city's many faces in *Calcutta, a cultural and literary history*, an erudite guide to the city.

> "The first mention of 'Calcutta' comes in 1688 in a letter written from Dacca (Dhaka) by two East India Company servants of the chief of a Company in Bengal. In 1689, Job Charnock – the man who has become known as the founder of Calcutta – began using 'Calcutta' in the official communications."[2]

"The foundation of Calcutta in 1690 by the East India Company near the fishing village of Kolikata"[3] marked the beginning of an incredible story in which the city transformed itself in "the pearl of the crown" – India's capital during the Raj and the second city of British Empire, the city of Robert Clive, Warren Hastings, and Lord Curzon, but also home to extraordinary Bengalis such as Rabindranath Tagore, the first Nobel laureate of Asia; Satyajit Ray, a very important name in cinema or Mother Teresa.

Its foundation date "is certain – 24 August 1690. […] And so, Kolkata, unusually among the major cities of the world, can claim to have a precise founding day."[4] Krishna Dutta's evocation of the city's

---

[2] Krishna Dutta, *Calcutta, a cultural and literary history*, Foreword by Anita Desai, New Delhi: Supernova Publishers, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 1.
[3] Ibidem, p. xxvi.
[4] Ibidem, p. 2.

social life in the 18th and 19th centuries, of its churches and cemeteries, clubs and palaces, the stories of the river Hugli (Hooghly) that gave birth to the city, descriptions of the main railway station at Haora (Howrah), Belur Math (the international headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order) or the Botanical Garden founded in 1787 by the East India Company, accomodating a huge 250-year-old Banyan tree,[5] mentioned in the Guinness Book of Records, complete the portrait of a city of extremes, where exquisite refinement rubs shoulders with coarse commercialism and political violence speak about the city's unique history and modern identity as reflected in its architecture, literature, cinema and music. "Anyone who wants to understand modern India has to visit Kolkata."[6] The reason is simple: "The city continues to reinvent itself and today has adapted well at the changes in the country's global economy."[7]

For Anita Desai, Calcutta was "the first metropolis I had set eyes on," in the late 1950s, when her family moved from Delhi to Bengal. At that time, "Calcutta [...] seemed to pulse with a sense of purpose, a confidence in its raison d'être."[8] Desai's appreciation for the city was

---

[5] My presentation entitled "Walking under the Banyan Tree. Travels in the Sacred India" was part of The European Society for the Study of English 2024 Conference, Lausanne, 24-30 August 2024, as part of the Panel 42: "Multifaceted India in Travel Literature." I used the Banyan tree as a metaphor for illustrating contemporary travels into the heart of India, its customs and traditions, its sites of cultural heritage and spiritual enlightenment. In 2009, as a postdoctoral researcher in Calcutta, I had the privilege to visit the botanical garden and to see this majestic Banyan tree. Nevertheless to say it impressed me, and since then, it became a personal metaphor for my increasing interest into Indian studies. The Banyan tree ultimately symbolizes my experience of looking for essence, and my continuous curiosity regarding the unique representations of Indian culture.

[6] Krishna Dutta, *Calcutta, a cultural and literary history*, op. cit., p. xi.

[7] Jerry Pinto and Rahul Srivastava, *Talk of the Town. Stories of Twelve Indian Cities*, Gurugram: Puffin Books, Penguin Random House India, 2008, Chapter dedicated to "Kolkata/Calcutta: We have even more culture", pp. 69-79, see p. 77.

[8] Anita Desai, "Dining Out and In Calcutta," in *The New York Review*, September 26, 2013 issue, available online: https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/09/26/dining-out-and-calcutta/, last accessed on September 14, 2024.

evident in her in 1965 novel, *Voices in the City*, a chronicle of the social changes in a modernizing India, exploring what happens when traditional Indian ways of life come into conflict with new ideas, and the effect this has on young people. Calcutta itself was an important character in the novel, as Desai presented the city as a force that helps in shaping the lives of its people. She also described the negative side of living in Calcutta, emphasizing the crowds, noisiness, frenzied pace, and lack of places to think and reflect, a place where young people hardly find happiness in their lives. But still, Calcutta continues to fascinate its residents as they struggle to make it their home.

One can not miss the excellent novel written by Dominique Lapierre, *The City of Joy*, published in 1985, a wonderful story that received the Christopher Award in 1986, "for creative work that exhibits the highest values of the human spirit," and was adapted into a 1992 film directed by Roland Joffe and starring Patrick Swayze. It is because of this book that Calcutta is named "the city of joy," even though the current day's expression is quite different from the initial one.

Calcutta represents a major part of the fictional worlds of aclaimed writer Amitav Ghosh, and this not only because Calcutta is his birth place, but also because of his strong interest in the welfare of the city and its surroundings.[9] Amitav Ghosh devoted two extraordinary novels to the city: *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995).

Jhumpa Lahiri does the same in her novel *The Namesake*, published in 2003. A film adaptation of the novel, under the directions of Mira Nair, was released in 2006. For Lahiri, Calcutta is

[9] As expressed in a conversation with Sukanta Chaudhuri at the Kolkata Literary Meet 2024, on the importance of Sundarbans: "Kolkata wouldn't exist without the Sundarbans. They are what protect Kolkata." The entire discussion can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DV9c_LjRq78.

> "one of the most fascinating places on earth. It's a city that is like no other, with a life, a cultural life, a history utterly its own, and hard, and beautiful. Its beauty is not conventional."[10]

Amit Chaudhuri's *Calcutta. Two Years in the City*[11] is a recent example of how a city can grow around you and transform you in different ways. Imagined a few years before, and explained in a Diary note for *The London Review of Books*,[12] and also in an interview with Anita Sethi as "the first place I encountered modernity and became addicted to it,"[13] Calcutta is the place of all possibilities. The book takes its readers into the heart of the metropolis, introducing the homeless and the high society, describes its architecture and food, its sounds and smells, and its past and present politics. Chaudhuri combines memoir, reportage, and history to explain his own passionate attachment to the city and its people.

Another writer that has recently written a wonderfully vivid and personal account of life in this teeming and troubled city is Kushanava Choudhury. His book, *The Epic City: The World on the Streets of Calcutta*,[14] reveals the city's rich culture, offering some excellent

---

[10] See Jhumpa Lahiri on Writing, Translation, and Crossing Between Cultures. Conversations with Tyler, at The Mercatus Center at George Mason University, January 2017, available online: https://medium.com/conversations-with-tyler/jhumpa-lahiri-books-novels-in-other-words-6271de0ac8d9#.zhwwy5jxv. See also excerpts of it on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pF3qSNPlSgM, last accessed on September 14, 2024.

[11] Amit Chaudhuri, *Calcutta. Two Years in the City,* New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2014.

[12] Amit Chaudhuri, "Diary. In Calcutta", in *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 33, No. 10, 19 May 2011, available online: https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v33/n10/amit-chaudhuri/diary, last accessed on September 14, 2024.

[13] Anita Sethi, interview with Amit Chaudhuri, in *The White Review*, March 2013, online exclusive: https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-amit-chaudhuri/, last accessed on September 14, 2024.

[14] Kushanava Choudhury, *The Epic City: The World on the Streets of Calcutta,* New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2018.

descriptions of the special Bengali *adda* (the "sweet Bengali pastime of aimless digressive conversation",) its addictive street food, or the bibliophile delights of College Street, "not just a street but a labyrinth made of books." His book is truly a love letter to the city.

There are many reasons because why Calcutta is a city like no other in the world. Under The East India Company, and later the Crown rule, Calcutta served as the *de facto* capital of India, until 1911. It was the second largest city in the British Empire, after London, and was the centre of politics, law, education, science and the arts in India. After the independence, Calcutta suffered many decades of economic stagnation before it rebounded and reinvented itself as one of India's premier cities.

Calcutta is the cultural capital of India, and home to venerable institutions of national importance, including the Academy of Fine Arts, the Asiatic Society, the Indian Museum and the National Library of India. The University of Calcutta, first modern university in south Asia and its affiliated colleges produced many leading figures. Calcutta has the highest number of Nobel laureates among all cities of India.[15]

The residents of Calcutta engage in *addas*, or leisurely chats, that often take the form of freestyle intellectual conversation. College Street seems the best place to do so, as in the area are an incredible large number of books sellers, as the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen writes in his memoirs:

> "As I turned the corner from Harrison Road into College Street, there was suddenly a massive constellation of bookshops of every kind. From books protected by glass-fronted wooden bookshelves inside the solidly built shops to heaps and heaps of books precariously balanced on ad hoc

---

[15] Five Nobel laureates are from Calcutta or have a connection with the city: Rabindranath Tagore (the first Nobel laureate of Asia – Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913), CV Raman (Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930), Mother Teresa (Nobel Prize in Peace in 1979), Amartya Sen (Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998), and Abhijit Banerjee (Nobel Prize for Economics, 2019).

> pedestals on the pavements – a million books calling for attention. I had the wonderful sense that I had come to the right place on Earth."[16]

Home in the World is the true story of an international recognized intellectual who answered spontaneously to a question about the language he dreams in: "Bengali, mostly."

After a while in the city of joy, everybody seems to feel at home: "I realized that I was beginning to know Calcutta, to recognize landmarks, to hear the sounds of the language, to read the signs," as Wendy Doniger recollects.[17] Her enchanting volume, *An American Girl in India*, offers a vivid description of the city in the years following the independence of India, a culture of contradictions in which the young scholar is trying to find her way. I recognized myself in many of her words, as I also "have much to tell you about Calcutta," and "Ramakrishna Mission, which is […] full of scholars and all sorts of wonderful people"[18] was our first residence in the city.[19]

The presence of *paras*, which are neighborhoods that possess a strong sense of community, is another important characteristic of the city, which can be better observed during the Durga Puja Festival.[20] Calcutta is also recognized for its diverse and delicious street food, and

---

[16] Amartya Sen, *Home in the World. A Memoir*, New Delhi: Allen Lane, an Imprint of Penguin Books, 2021, p. 183.

[17] Wendy Doniger, *An American Girl in India. Letters and Recollections, 1963-64*, New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Books, 2022, p. 137.

[18] Ibidem, pp. 34-35.

[19] Wendy Doniger stayed there in August 1963, when she arrived in Calcutta, and I was accommodated at the Ramakrishna Mission in October 2007, in my first visit to Calcutta, and also in February 2008. After reading *An American Girl in India*, I wrote to her about the similar experiences we had and she replied that "Calcutta is a beautiful rough place."

[20] "*Durga Puja* is an annual festival celebrated in September or October, most notably in Kolkata. [...] During the event, the divides of class, religion and ethnicities collapse as crowds of spectators walk around to admire the installations." More details about the festival: https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/durga-puja-in-kolkata-00703, last accessed on September 14, 2024.

the Bengali sweets are definitively considered as one of the major characteristics of the city.[21]

The spectacle of thanking God, by whatever name He/She bears, is enchanting in Calcutta. Small temples can be found everywhere. In Gol Park, across the road from the Ramakrishna Mission, one can see many such miniature temples, right on the sidewalk. People stop, worship, bring offerings to the deity and leave a penny to the man who watches over the candle. Hindu women buy garlands of flowers every day to decorate the statue of the deity that watches over their homes. The protective deity of the home has its own, separate room, with a small altar. It is where every practicing Hindu's day begins, and where it ends. Scented sticks, candles, flowers, the ritual bath of the deity and the family, all make up a complex ritual.

Close to Golpark and Dakuria Lake there is a wonderful Japanese Buddhist temple. The threshold of the temple is crossed by dozens of people daily; Buddhists, Hindus, Christians or other religions come here to learn about the diversity of faiths and human unity. The same thing happens in any other place of worship in Calcutta, regardless of whether it is Hindu, Muslim, Christian, people of different religious beliefs learn about each other. In Saint Paul's Cathedral, I met a lot of Muslims, and in the Greek Orthodox Church, located across the street from the Kalighat temple I found Christians and Hindus together on Good Friday. Dakshineshwar Temple, one of the most beautiful temples in Bengal, is visited by thousands of people every day. Calcutta is also home to significant Jewish and Sikh communities. The secret of the peaceful coexistence of all these people belonging to such different religions is

[21] For a recent overview of Calcutta's delights see Debika Banerji and Anandita Pan, "Kolkata's Foodscape: the Evolution of 'the Calcutta palate'" in the *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies*, no. 6, 2022, pp. 75-108, open access and available online: http://www.editura.ubbcluj.ro/bd/ebooks/pdf/3312.pdf.

tolerance and respect for the other, regardless of their color or religion. In few places in the world you meet this religious diversity and, at the same time, this unity and human brotherhood.

Religious ceremonies are the most important and through them each community redefines its uniqueness. Unique in Calcutta's religious diversity is the Hindu marriage ceremony. You cannot talk about the spectacle of life in Calcutta without referring to a Hindu marriage. The perfection of detail; the re-establishment, for a few hours, of the ancient traditions; the opulence of the groom's suits; the fire ceremony and all the other moments of such a celebration give you the feeling that you are participating in the transmission of a secret. In fact, the whole ceremony is an initiatory one; the bride and groom are initiated in stepping into a new stage of their life together.

In Calcutta, the other is called *dada* (brother) or *didi* (sister). The fruit seller, a Hindu, smiled at me every time he saw me and called me *didi*. The boy from whom I bought milk and bread, a Muslim, addressed me the same. Although the differences between people (in terms of gender or color) are visible, a simple word, *didi* (or *dada*), makes us all equal. *Didi* is also me, the Romanian who came to Calcutta to learn about Rabindranath Tagore and Maitreyi Devi, *didi* is also the Muslim woman covered with a *burka* that leaves only her eyes visible, *didi* is also the nun that guards Mother Teresa's grave, but also the woman who sells tea at the street corner. We are so different, but ultimately so similar. We often hide behind some artificially created differences and lose sight of the essential: the life of each of us lasts only a moment!

In the English cemetery in Park Street you realize how ephemeral our presence here in this world is. "Important people" who played a major role in the history of colonial India are buried in the Park Street cemetery. But in the face of death, with all their greatness, the Sahibs who came to conquer the world, like the poor Sudhras who did not dare

to look them in the eye, are equal. “We all owe a death,” says the poet. And what does it matter if the body was burned and the ashes scattered in the four corners or that the remains were deposited in impressive mausoleums? What remains important is only the moment that person lived and how he/she used it. In the Park Street Cemetery also stands the mausoleum erected in the memory of William Jones, the founder, in 1784, of The Asiatic Society of Bengal. He was among the few “conquerors” who truly understood India and who left behind something that can still be seen today: access to culture, the only thing through which a civilization survives over time.

Everything is possible in Calcutta, you just have to believe in yourself and to have the strength to always think further, to push your limits always higher, even if you don’t know at the moment if you can do what you want you dream. Always be ready to learn something new! Knowledge opens unsuspected doors. It’s just one of the lessons that Calcutta gave me, for free, every day. But Calcutta also taught me that the man is the measure to all things; that the border between the sacred and the profane is, most of the time, very thin; that the most beautiful things and places are those that reawaken long-forgotten feelings in you.

When you visit Calcutta for a few days, everything around seems exotic and different from the place you come from. But if you stay for a longer period, you realize that this city of over 15 million souls is a place like any other under the sun, with people living their lives the best they can. You realize that time flows the same way in Calcutta as in any part of the world and that the only difference is the way you perceive its flow. Only when you stay longer you can feel the place and integrate into the landscape, into the crowd. You get to know people, make friends; discover places that become favorites; you get to appreciate the tastes and aromas. And after more time you tell yourself that here every day resembles the one that just ended, but it’s just an impression, because

every day is a new beginning. Many things happen in Calcutta the same way, but those that happen differently make the difference between the past and the future, between yesterday and tomorrow. Calcutta beyond the words of writers and singers is the city I truly love, and for many reasons, Calcutta will always be my home.

References:

Chaudhuri, Amit, *Calcutta. Two Years in the City*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2014.

Choudhury, Kushanava, *The Epic City: The World on the Streets of Calcutta*, New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2018.

Doniger, Wendy, *An American Girl in India. Letters and Recollections, 1963-64*, New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Books, 2022.

Dutta, Krishna, *Calcutta, a cultural and literary history*, Foreword by Anita Desai, New Delhi: Supernova Publishers, 3rd edition, 2015.

Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007.

Pinto, Jerry and Rahul Srivastava, *Talk of the Town. Stories of Twelve Indian Cities*, Gurugram: Puffin Books, Penguin Random House India, 2008, Chapter "Kolkata/Calcutta: We have even more culture", pp. 69-79.

Sen, Amartya, *Home in the World. A Memoir*, New Delhi: Allen Lane, an Imprint of Penguin Books, 2021.

About the Author:

Mihaela Gligor is Scientific Researcher in the Philosophy of Culture at The Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca, "George Barițiu" Institute of History, Department of Humanities, and also the founder and the Director of *Cluj Center for Indian Studies* from Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca.

Contact: mihaela.gligor@ubbcluj.ro.

Silent Bearers of the City’s Filth: the “Unseen” Conservancy Labor of Colonial Calcutta

Maria-Daniela POMOHACI
***Center for Modern Indian Studies* (CeMIS),**
Georg-August Universität Göttingen, Germany

Abstract: This article delves into the vital yet marginalized labor of *Mehtars* and other sanitation workers in colonial Calcutta, who were responsible for the manual removal of night-soil. These workers, designated as “untouchables” and subjected to deep social stigmatization, played a crucial role in maintaining urban hygiene in a rapidly growing colonial city. Initially, their labor was performed under the cover of night, but as public health concerns grew, sanitation tasks were shifted to daylight hours. This change brought the Mehtars into public view, forcing the Calcutta Municipal Corporation to reconcile their indispensable labor with the rigid caste-based social hierarchy. This article examines the intersection of caste, labor, and municipal sanitation reforms, exploring how sanitation workers navigated these dual pressures of being both essential and stigmatized. The analysis contributes to the social history of labor in colonial India, shedding light on one of the most marginalized sectors of the urban workforce.

Keywords: Sanitation Workers, Mehtars, Caste, Labour, Conservancy, Colonial Calcutta, Urban Infrastructure.

Motto:

"Why do they shun your touch, my friend and call you unclean
Whom cleanliness follows at every step
making the earth and air sweet for our dwelling"

'The Scavenger' by Satyendranath Datta,
translated from Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore[1]

Shrouded in the shadows of night, *Mehtars*, equipped with brooms and pans in their hands, and buckets of excreta balanced on their heads, manually cleaned both public and private dry latrines in colonial Calcutta. Silently, they entered the back entrances of colonial houses to scrape away the so-called night-soil[2] or lowered themselves the city's narrow drains to clear blockages. Alongside sweepers, carters, *Doms*, and other sanitation workers, the *Mehtars* were commonly referred to as 'scavengers' in colonial records. Employed by the Conservancy Department of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC), these workers were responsible for removing refuse, human and animal excrement, from latrines, sewers, drains, and streets. Due to the perceived polluting nature of their labor, 'scavengers' were designated as 'untouchables' and relegated to the lowest strata of Indian society. Regardless of their religion, 'scavenging' has historically been a caste-based occupation, subject to profound social stigma and discrimination.

[1] The original title is "Methar" and it was published in the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, 10 March 1928.

[2] Night-soil is a Victorian euphemism for human faeces and urine, for more see Dean T. Ferguson, "Nightsoil and the 'Great Divergence': Human Waste, the Urban Economy, and Economic Productivity, 1500-1900," *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 3 (2014): 379-402.

Initially, the processes of garbage and excreta or night-soil removal were conducted during the nighttime, but due to complaints from both municipal authorities and residents, these were eventually shifted to daytime operations – a change that had profound implications for the 'scavengers.' Divided into three parts, this article examines the intersection of caste, labor, and municipal sanitation reforms by exploring the nature of the night-soil removal processes, the working conditions of the 'scavengers,' and the regulation of their service within the Conservancy Department, with a special focus on the shift from nighttime to daytime work and how it affected the labourers. Through this analysis, the paper contributes to the social history of one of the most marginalized segments of the urban labor force in late-colonial Calcutta.

Defining the Terminology

Before engaging in a detailed analysis of the aforementioned topics, it is essential to clarify the terminology used throughout this article. The sanitation workers employed by the Calcutta Municipal Corporation were referred to by various names in both colonial and post-colonial primary sources. Some of these terms were profession-specific, including 'scavengers'/'manual scavengers', 'sweepers', 'carters', 'coolies', 'night-soil removers', and 'drain cleaners'. Others reflected caste designations, such as '*Mehtars*'/'*Methars*' (with the feminine form '*Mehtrani*' in Bengal), '*Balmiki*', '*Bhangis*' (used in northern and northwestern India), and '*Doms*' or '*Hadis*'/'*Haris*' (in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar).[3] These terms were often applied interchangeably and without clear distinction, leading to considerable ambiguity.

---

[3] For more about caste names, see Tanika Sarkar, "'Dirty Work, Filthy Caste': Calcutta Scavengers in the 1920s," in *Working Lives & Worker Militancy: The Politics of Labour in Colonial India*, ed. Ravi Ahuja (Tulika Books, 2013); Tanika Sarkar, "Caste-Ing Servants in Colonial Calcutta," in *Servants' Pasts: Late-Eighteenth to Twentieth-Century*

Efforts by historians and sociologists to precisely define these terms have yet to result in a consensus. In primary sources, workers identified as 'scavengers', 'sweepers', '*Mehtars*', or '*Doms*' are sometimes specifically described as those responsible for the manual removal of human or animal excreta from latrines, streets, or drains. Recognizing this confusion, the Calcutta Municipal Corporation issued a resolution in response to the 'scavengers' strike in 1928, formally defining the term 'scavenger'. According to this resolution, from July 5, 1928, 'scavengers' were classified as municipal employees tasked with cleaning streets, drains, and sewers, as well as maintaining surface and household drains. This category also encompassed conservancy lorry coolies, refuse platform coolies, market sweepers, and coolies working at incinerators, dumping grounds, and trenching grounds.[4] The unifying factor among these workers was their contact with 'impure' materials such as garbage, refuse, night-soil, and even dead bodies.

Consequently, during the colonial period, the term 'scavenger' became a broad designation in official municipal and government documents, applied to almost all laborers within the Conservancy Department. However, I argue that this term is discriminatory, pejorative, and degrading. Throughout this analysis, I will instead employ more appropriate terminology: 'sanitation workers' to refer to all Conservancy Department staff involved in cleaning activities as per the 1928 CMC definition, '*Mehtars*'/'*Mehtrani*' for those engaged in excreta removal, and 'sweepers' for street cleaners.

The maintenance of urban cleanliness has consistently been a critical function of municipal administrations globally, and colonial Calcutta

---

South Asia, ed. Nitin Sinha, Nitin Varma, and Pankaj Jha (Orient BlackSwan, 2019); Joel Lee, *Deceptive Majority: Hinduism, Untouchability, and Underground Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[4] *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, 05 July 1928.

was no exception. The city's hot and humid climate exacerbated the hazards posed by uncollected roadside refuse and unwashed service privies, which not only emitted foul odors and noxious fumes but also posed significant public health risks as potential sources of epidemics.

From the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, the persistent unsanitary conditions of Calcutta's streets and public toilets became a matter of widespread concern. Health inspectors, municipal councilors, rate-payers, and travelers alike frequently lamented the uncleanliness of the city's thoroughfares. Local newspapers and official gazettes routinely reported instances of streets remaining uncleared for extended periods, overflowing public dustbins, and refuse commingled with unremoved slush, particularly during the monsoon season.

In response to growing concerns about sanitation, the Calcutta Municipal Corporation established a comprehensive Conservancy Department, with well-defined responsibilities. Sweepers, assisted by carters, were tasked with the daily removal of domestic and commercial refuse, street litter, dust, and animal waste. *Mehtars*, on the other hand, were entrusted with the critical duty of removing human excreta from residential homes and public privies. This article primarily focuses on the process of night-soil removal and the working conditions of the *Mehtars*.

Mehtars **– an Occupational or Caste-Based Category**

But who were the Mehtars? In her work, Tanika Sarkar raises the question of whether '*Mehtar*' referred to an occupational or caste-based category, and whether their untouchable status stemmed from ritual degradation or the nature of their work.[5] Sarkar examines census reports and contemporary Bengali sources, revealing that *Mehtars*, responsible

[5] Tanika Sarkar, "Making and Remaking of Caste and Labour - Calcutta Municipal Methars and Their Strikes in 1928," in *Kolkata in Space, Time, and Imagination*, Vol 1, ed. Anuradha Roy and Melitta Waligora (Primus Book, 2019), p. 186.

for waste removal, were relegated to the *Dom* and *Hadi* castes – considered the lowest of the low, even among the untouchables. British colonial administrator Herbert Hope Risley, writing in 1891, similarly described the *Mehtars* as a "subcaste of Hadis who remove night soil" and noted their connection to the Maghaya Kumbhars and the Dharkar subcaste of Doms.[6]

Contemporary Bengali sources, as noted by Sarkar and Uday Chandra, offer a different perspective. These sources frequently refer to the term 'Dhangars,' describing the Kol Adivasis[7] from the Chotanagpur region, initially employed for deforestation, drainage, and swamp clearance in the areas where Calcutta was established.[8] Once these tasks were completed, many of these Adivasi laborers likely remained in Calcutta as waste removers. Over time, they were joined by waves of migrant workers from Northern and Eastern India during the nineteenth century.[9]

Latrine vs Privy

As the city rapidly expanded, the proper removal of excreta from both residential dwellings and public toilets became a crucial responsibility of the conservancy service. Whether for economic purposes or simply to prevent excreta from becoming a public nuisance or health hazard, the primary objective of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation was to ensure the regular, timely, and thorough removal of waste from latrines and privies. This mandate was clearly articulated by

---

[6] Tanika Sarkar, "Calcutta's Underbelly, Corporation 'Methars' and Their Early Strikes," in *Caste in Bengal: Histories of Hierarchy, Exclusion, and Resistance*, ed. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Tanika Sarkar (Permanent Black, 2023), p. 422.

[7] Adivasis is the collective name used for the original inhabitants or communities who lived and often continue to live close to forests.

[8] Uday Chandra, "Kol, Coolie, Colonial Subject: A Hidden History of Caste and the Making of Modern Bengal," in *Caste in Bengal: Histories of Hierarchy, Exclusion, and Resistance*, ed. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Tanika Sarkar (Permanent Black, 2023).

[9] Tanika Sarkar, "Caste-Ing Servants in Colonial Calcutta", p. 254.

Reginald Craufuird Sterndale in his 1881 sanitation manual.[10] The need for structured sanitation practices also led to important distinctions in how public and private sanitation facilities were managed.

In Bengal, a clear distinction existed between a latrine, which served as a public convenience, and a privy, which was designated for private households. The Municipal Corporation's *Mehtars* were responsible for cleaning both types of facilities. However, it was essential to maintain a strict separation between the staff tasked with cleaning public latrines and those assigned to privies. This segregation was necessary because householders paid a special fee, known as the conservancy tax or latrine fee, for the maintenance of sanitation workers.[11] Additionally, ensuring compliance with regulations governing the construction of privies and latrines was a crucial responsibility of the Conservancy Branch. According to Section 224 of the Bengal Municipal Act, the Municipality had the authority to address any inefficient or defective privy, while Section 231 empowered it to address unauthorized constructions or privies not constructed following approval. Furthermore, it was expected that *Mehtars* employed in cleaning both private and public toilets would promptly report any malfunctioning facilities to their superiors.[12]

Night-soil Disposal Methods in Colonial Bengal

Prior to the connection of public and private latrines to sewers, various systems were employed for collecting and disposing of night soil during colonial times in India. These included the Moule's system,[13] also

---

[10] Reginald Craufuird Sterndale, *Municipal Work in India - Hints on Sanitation: General Conservancy and Improvement in Municipalities, Towns, and Villages* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1881), p. 120.

[11] Jahar Lal Das, *A Manual of Conservancy* (Calcutta: Butterworth, 1919), p. 44.

[12] Ibidem, p. 45.

[13] Sterndale, *Municipal Work in India, or, Hints on Sanitation*, pp. 133-135.

known as the dry earth system, the Bombay Hallalcore system,[14] referred to as the bucket system, the Système Goux[15] or the Pali system, the Rochdale System,[16] the Poonah System[17] or 'sun-drying process', and the Trenching System, among others.

The most prevalent method used in colonial Calcutta combined Moule's system, the Bombay Hallalcore system, and the Trenching system. Moule's system involved the use of a dry earth closet in private privies. Patented by British priest Henry Moule in 1873, it spread throughout the British Raj, primarily among affluent families due to the high cost of acquiring dry earth in large quantities. Dry earth was believed to act as a natural deodorizer, eliminating odours and preventing the escape of harmful vapours. However, this process required the addition of one and a half to two and a half pounds of dry earth per stool to neutralize odours.[18] Moreover, for every pound of excreta removed from the city, three to four times the amount of earth had to be brought in and removed again. R. Sterndale dismissed Moule's system as impractical for general municipal use due to difficulties in procuring, drying, storing, and distributing earth.[19] An improved version was the Bombay Hallalcore system, adopted by the Calcutta Corporation in 1874. Its main feature was the daily removal of night soil by the *Mehtars*.

The Night-soil Removal Processes

In Calcutta, as in other cities across the British Empire, the removal of excreta from dwellings was initially carried out under the cover of night.

---

[14] Ibidem, pp. 124-125.
[15] For more details about Système Goux see Sterndale, *Municipal Work in India*, pp. 127-130, pp. 134-135.
[16] Ibidem, p. 138.
[17] Ibidem, pp. 138-139.
[18] Ibidem, p. 123.
[19] Ibidem, p. 124.

This practice gave rise to terms such as 'night-soil' for excreta, 'nightmen' for the sanitation workers tasked with its removal, and 'night-carts' for the vehicles used in the process, which frequently appeared in British official documents.[20] However, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed in the following sections, this process was eventually shifted to daytime operations. As a result, the collection of night-soil began early each morning and, at times, again in the afternoon. *Mehtars* were usually mustered early in the morning at 5 and 5:30 a.m. to commence work at daybreak. Similar to carters, they also received a ticket to be collected by their overseer either at the pali nightsoil transfer depot or at the trenching grounds, indicating the number of toilets to be cleaned.[21]

For convenience of work and better supervision, Calcutta was divided into several blocks or sections. Each batch of eight to twelve *Mehtars* was assigned to clean privies or latrines within a specific block/section. Typically, if houses were densely clustered, no more than 30 to 40 houses were allocated to each *Mehtar*. Conversely, if houses were scattered, requiring Mehtars to cover longer distances for night-soil collection, the number of privies per *Mehtar* decreased, ranging from 15 to 25 based on distance.[22] Supervision of each batch of *Mehtars* was entrusted to a *jamadar* or headman, directly accountable to the Conservancy Inspector. Furthermore, each *jamadar* oversaw the cleaning of 300 to 400 privies or the work of 10 to 12 *Mehtars*.[23]

The *Mehtars* went from house to house with buckets and brooms into their hands to scoop out the night-soil from the privy pan or *gamalaa*[24] utilizing a shallow earthen-ware vessel. They deposited it into

---

[20] *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 07 October 1880.
[21] Lal Das, *A Manual of Conservancy*, p. 8.
[22] Sterndale, *Municipal Work in India*, pp. 124-125.
[23] Lal Das, *A Manual of Conservancy*, p. 66.
[24] *Gamalaa*, (from Hindi) a large and deep earthen vessel with a broad mouth.

tarred wooden or iron buckets/palis with tight-fitting lids, ensuring strength and containment. Following collection, *Mehtars* transported the pails, unless directed otherwise, promptly to the night-soil or pail depots for transfer to awaiting night-soil carts. Pali depots served as designated sites for transferring night-soil from pails or buckets to carts.[25]

Each female 'scavenger', or *Methrani*, balanced a pail on her head, while the *Mehtar* or male 'scavenger' typically carried two pails slung on either side of a bamboo pole, from the house to the night-soil carts.[26] In certain areas lacking sewer systems, the pails were either directly transported to the trenching ground, or they were taken to the nearest depots connected with sewers, where the night-soil was discharged. Until the mid-1930s, when the conservancy service was mechanized, night-soil carts were pulled by bullocks or buffaloes. However, due to their animal-drawn nature, the carts moved slowly through the streets, causing annoyance and disgust among residents and passersby. In towns like Howrah, night-soil was transported in special railway wagons pulled by steam engines. To prevent splashing during transit, these wagons were filled with night-soil up to about two-thirds of their depth.[27]

The process of transferring night-soil was completed each morning within a specified timeframe, typically between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m., followed by thorough cleaning of all pails and depots.

Final Disposal

In colonial Calcutta, there were various methods of excreta disposal. Historian Tanika Sarkar notes that until the early 19th century, sanitation workers disposed of garbage and night-soil into nearby ponds,

---

[25] Lal Das, *A Manual of Conservancy*, p. 65.
[26] Ibidem, pp. 70-71.
[27] Ibidem, pp. 71-72.

wastelands, or open drains lining the streets.[28] By 1864, over 200 tons of excreta were daily deposited into the Hooghly River. However, this practice ceased in 1870 when excreta from depots were directed to the main sewers of the new drainage system.[29]

Although drainage works advanced significantly in the nineteenth century, with more private latrines connected to sewers, many "unconnected" privies still utilized the dry system method of night-soil removal. For these, Mehtars employed either the trenching method, burying night soil in shallow trenches, or incineration. Trenching, universally practised in colonial India, leveraged dry earth's natural deodorizing properties and soil's nitrifying organisms to convert nitrogenous organic compounds into nitrates.[30] This method was advantageous, disposing of excreta effectively without causing nuisance and gradually raising land levels, particularly beneficial for Calcutta's low-lying areas. When strictly followed, trenching converted night-soil into an odourless mass within six months, making the land suitable for cultivation, including crops like cabbage, cauliflower, jute, sugarcane, and eggplant.[31]

By the first half of the twentieth century, with the completion of suburban drainage schemes, trenching grounds at Ultadinghi, Sura, Pagladonga, Tiljala, Dhakuria, and Goragatcha were closed.[32] Another less common method in Calcutta involved burning night soil in incinerators. In 1919, only one incinerator existed at Lillooah (near

---

[28] Tanika Sarkar, "'Dirty Work, Filthy Caste': Calcutta Scavengers in the 1920s," in *Working Lives & Worker Militancy: The Politics of Labour in Colonial India*, ed. Ravi Ahuja (Tulika Books, 2013), p. 185.
[29] S. W. Goode, *Municipal Calcutta: Its Institutions in Their Origin and Growth* (Edinburgh: Corporation of Calcutta, 1916), pp. 170-171.
[30] Lal Das, *A Manual of Conservancy*, p. 80.
[31] Ibidem, p. 85.
[32] Goode, *Municipal Calcutta*, p. 173.

Howrah) in connection with the East Indian Railway (E.I.R.) workshop, exclusively for burning night-soil.[33]

As per a resolution from the Education Department of the Government of India, published on May 23, 1914, incineration was favoured over the trenching system following the water carriage system. The suitability of incineration or shallow trenching, or a combination of these methods with a water carriage system, depended largely on local conditions and customs. While water carriage, with eventual disposal on sewage farms, was typically the most effective option apart from drainage and sewerage systems, its widespread implementation might have been impractical for many towns. In such cases, the choice often lies between incineration and trenching. Incineration was generally considered safer and preferable if conditions allowed. Trenching was often seen as more economical, but the profits from selling poudrette produced from trenching diminished significantly when considering the expenses of transportation and supervision. The primary consideration in all cases was ensuring prompt removal and disposal of excreta.[34]

Concerning the water-carriage system, it stood out as the most costly method of excreta removal compared to the aforementioned approaches. This was primarily due to its reliance on what was termed the "Sanitary Trinity," as mentioned in "Municipal Work in India."[35] This "trinity" comprised three essential components: a comprehensive network of underground sewers, a reliable and robust water supply system, and a suitable and unobjectionable outlet for the discharge of sewer contents.[36] The effectiveness of the water-carriage system hinged upon the presence and functionality of all three of these main features.

---

[33] Lal Das, *A Manual of Conservancy*, pp. 89-90.
[34] Ibidem, p. 79.
[35] Sterndale, *Municipal Work in India*, p. 122.
[36] Idem.

The majority of Calcutta's night soil from connected privies was directed through the sewers to specific pumping stations, such as the Palmer's Bridge Pumping Station and the drainage pumping station at Ballygunge, primarily serving the southern areas of the city. Meanwhile, the Added Areas from the east utilized the Manicktollah Pumping Station for the removal of excreta.[37] In 1878, only 5,400 privies were directly connected to the sewers, but the situation changed significantly by the twentieth century.[38] By analyzing the statistical data regarding the newly connected private and service privies provided by the yearly Reports on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta for the period between 1927 and 1950,[39] I wanted to identify trends in the privies connections over the study period. The analysis revealed a steady increase in the number from 27,285 in 1927[40] to 46,516 in 1950[41] of private privies connected to the underground drainage system with fluctuations observed in certain years. Specifically, there was a notable surge in connections in the late 1940s, peaking in 1948 before experiencing a slight decline in 1950 and 1951. Overall, the data indicates significant progress with an increment of over 70 per cent in sanitation infrastructure development during this period, reflecting efforts to address the growing urban population's needs and improve public health conditions.

---

[37] S. W. Goode, *Municipal Calcutta*, 1916, p. 173.

[38] Tanika Sarkar, "'Dirty Work, Filthy Caste': Calcutta Scavengers in the 1920s," in *Working Lives & Worker Militancy: The Politics of Labour in Colonial India*, ed. Ravi Ahuja (Tulika Books, 2013), p. 187.

[39] From *Report on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta for the Year 1927* (Calcutta: Corporation Press) to *Report on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta for the Year 1950*.

[40] *Report on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta for the Year 1927* (Calcutta: Corporation Press, 1928), vol. 1, part II, Appendix H - Engineer's Department, p. 75.

[41] *Report on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta for the Year 1950* (Calcutta: Corporation Press, 1951), vol. 1, part II, Appendix H - Engineer's Department, p. 50.

This exponential increase in privies, however, primarily benefited the wealthier segments of Calcutta's population. While the more affluent households enjoyed connected privies, poorer bustee residents were often forced to share a single toilet among four to five huts, rely on public latrines, or resort to open defecation, as demonstrated by Sarkar in her article.[42]

Working Conditions of the *Mehtars*

Despite these sanitary advancements, the working conditions of the Mehtars saw no significant improvement. It was a known fact that their working conditions were "insanitary and repugnant".[43] Throughout the colonial period, and even in the post-independence period, observations regarding these "inhumane" working conditions were published not only in the pages of the newspapers and municipal gazettes but also in the special committees' reports by municipal councillors or health inspectors. This is the case of the Ad-interim Report of the Special Committee appointed in May 1933 to formulate a scheme to improve the working and living conditions of the sweepers and Mehtars under the Corporation. After five days of inspections of the Districts' bustees, *Mehtars'* barracks,[44] *gowkhanas*,[45] and the working sites, the Committee presided by Satish Chandra Das Gupta came up with a set of observations and recommendations, to be submitted to the municipal authorities. Regarding the working conditions, the Committee reported that the Corporation "have not been treating the mehtars as human

---

[42] Tanika Sarkar, "'Dirty Work, Filthy Caste': Calcutta Scavengers in the 1920s", p. 186.
[43] *Calcutta Municipal Gazette,* 27 May 1933.
[44] Mehtars' Barracks refer to the municipal accommodation facilities provided by the Corporation to their Conservancy Department employees.
[45] *Gowkhana* (lit. cattle-shed), one of the earliest institutions of the Municipality; it may be briefly described as a depot for storing the refuse carts and stabling the municipal cattle (Goode, *Municipal Calcutta: Its Institutions in Their Origin and Growth*, p. 153).

beings",[46] because in order to fulfill their assignments they have to crawl in through trap doors and remove night soil from earth-ware pots. Furthermore, the Committee found the floors of the service privies were "thick with splashing of rotting night soil accumulating for ages" and "vermins were creeping in a semi-solid substance spread over the floor".[47] It was expected of the mehtars to stand there in this mess and remove the night soil. Most of the time, it happened that these privies were "dry latrines", meaning that there was no running water to flush them and even more, due to the scarcity of water, the sanitation workers had difficulties in procuring sufficient water for cleaning them. In addition, they had no provisions to wash their buckets and their utensils after the removal of the night-soil and it was expected of the workers to carry the buckets/palis full of excreta on their heads or shoulders. Their working conditions did not improve at all as it was shown in an article published in the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, in April 1940, by the same Satish Chandra Das Gupta. In his article, he offered an in-depth description of the working conditions of the conservancy labourers and how they were treated by the Corporation. According to him, in 1940, the Corporation had several thousand of what is called "service privy" where the excreta had to be removed by hand.

> "The conditions in which these latrines are kept, in inhuman arrangement for cleaning them and the approaches to them are so abominable that readers may not tolerate a description of them."[48]

He added that some of these privies were hundreds of years old, while others were erected every day on the same pattern. Das Gupta argued that the problem lay with both the Corporation officials as well as

[46] *Calcutta Municipal Gazette,* 27 May 1933.
[47] Idem.
[48] *Calcutta Municipal Gazette,* 27 April 1940.

with the house-owners. None of them were able and willing to change. According to him, the house-owners refused to change to a better pattern, while the Corporation denied spending for their betterment. Furthermore, he mentioned that it was

> "too idle to introduce improvement in sanctioning new ones, therefore they and the conditions necessary for serving them, must remain abdominally the same."[49]

Regulating the Work of the Mehtars

Despite being fully aware of the challenging conditions faced by their employees, the Corporation took no steps to improve the working environment of the Mehtars. Instead, as will be discussed in the following section, new rules and regulations were introduced that further restricted their benefits and curtailed their employment freedom.

Initially, Mehtars operated as privately hired laborers, allowing them some autonomy and negotiating power, as noted by Tanika Sarkar in her article "Making and Remaking of Caste and Labour."[50] However, with the introduction of Act VI in 1863, the Calcutta Municipal Corporation began centralizing their operations, enforcing strict regulations on wages, working hours, and the duties of Mehtars.[51] These changes, while aimed at improving urban sanitation, often resulted in increased oversight and diminished freedom for the workers. This section explores the evolving regulatory framework governing the Mehtars, the challenges they faced, and the ways in which their work became an integral yet highly controlled aspect of Calcutta's sanitation infrastructure.

---

[49] Idem.

[50] Tanika Sarkar, "Making and Remaking of Caste and Labour - Calcutta Municipal Methars and Their Strikes in 1928," in *Kolkata in Space, Time, and Imagination Vol 1*, ed. Anuradha Roy and Melitta Waligora (Primus Book, 2019), p. 201.

[51] S. W. Goode, *Municipal Calcutta*, p. 170.

In 1866, the municipal authorities invested in their own Tollah Mehtars depots but soon reverted to privately owned depots due to lower-than-expected profits. These changes led to new regulations, including a fee for emptying buckets at private depots, collected by a headman and handed over to the municipal authorities.[52] This fee likely contributed to night soil being discarded directly into drains, bathing areas, or neighborhood tanks and pools instead of reaching the depots or trenching grounds. Babu Srinath Mukherjee from Sobha Bazar complained that *Mehtars* scattered waste in adjoining areas, leaving it to dry in the sun.[53]

Due to these practices, Section 187 of Act III of 1884 prohibited the removal of night soil at night. H.T.S. Forrest, in the Manual of Conservancy, outlined additional reasons for this regulation: most Indian houses had privies in the backyard accessible only through the front door, which householders were reluctant to leave open all night. Additionally, Mehtars had a poor reputation for honesty, leading to objections against their nighttime entry. Mehtars themselves preferred daytime work due to fears of snakes, scorpions, ghosts, and being mistaken for thieves. Carrying a light at night would also hinder their work.[54]

However, not everyone opposed nighttime removal, as evidenced by an upper-caste resident Babu Bishunath Motilal of Bow Bazaar's complaint to the Fever Hospital Committee. "In a language more forcible than polite", he protested against *Mehtars* roaming the streets with baskets of filth during the day, causing a stench, especially to someone like him, who just had his meal.[55]

[52] Ibidem, pp. 170-171.
[53] Ibidem, p. 168.
[54] Lal Das, *A Manual of Conservancy*, p. 66.
[55] Goode, *Municipal Calcutta*, p. 169.

The Day-time Work Shift

The shift from night-time to daytime work for *Mehtars* in colonial Calcutta not only transformed their working hours but also brought the question of their visibility to the forefront. As sanitation workers, the *Mehtars* performed crucial tasks that kept the city's streets clean and prevented the spread of disease. Despite being labeled as "untouchables" and subjected to profound social stigma, the significance of their work could not be ignored by the municipal authorities. The shift to daytime work underscored the tension between the social ostracism they faced and the city's dependence on their labor.

During the night, the work of the Mehtars was largely unseen, allowing them to carry out their tasks under the cover of darkness and, to some extent, avoid direct interaction with the city's residents. However, the decision to move their labor to the daytime was driven by practical concerns from both the municipal authorities and the public. As sanitation became an urgent urban issue, the necessity of timely and effective waste removal led the authorities to overlook the stigmatization of *Mehtars*, "allowing" them to be visible during the day.

This increased visibility, however, came with new burdens. The daylight hours exposed the *Mehtars* to stricter rules governing their movement and behavior to maintain the fragile boundaries of purity and pollution. *Mehtars* were required to follow specific protocols designed to minimize contact with the upper-caste residents. They were instructed to use back doors when entering homes and to carry bells on their carts, alerting people to their approach and giving them the opportunity to avoid direct contact. These practices served as a constant reminder of the stigma attached to their labor, reinforcing the social hierarchies that dictated their exclusion.

The transition to daytime work was, therefore, a double-edged sword. On one hand, it highlighted the indispensable role of the Mehtars

in maintaining urban cleanliness and forced the city to recognize the labor of a group that had long been hidden in the shadows. On the other hand, it subjected them to even more rigid social controls, increasing the visibility of their stigmatized position while ensuring that their presence remained carefully regulated. The *Mehtars*' work, now done in plain sight, became a complex act of balancing the public necessity of sanitation with the oppressive demands of caste-based discrimination.

The process of night-soil removal in colonial Calcutta was both essential for public health and emblematic of the harsh realities faced by Mehtars. Tasked with cleaning privies, sewers, and drains, these workers carried out labor that was physically grueling and socially degrading. The shift from night-time to daytime operations not only exposed their work to public scrutiny but also subjected them to stricter rules, reinforcing caste-based stigmatization. Despite their critical role in maintaining the city's sanitation, Mehtars endured inhumane working conditions – handling night-soil with minimal protection and navigating strict social controls. Municipal reforms, rather than improving their status, often perpetuated these oppressive structures. This study highlights how the labor of night-soil removal, though vital for urban cleanliness, became a symbol of both exploitation and exclusion in colonial Calcutta, reflecting broader tensions between caste, labor, and public health in the city's evolving infrastructure.

References:

Calcutta Municipal Gazette

New South Wales Government Gazette

Report on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta, Printed at the Corporation Press, 1911.

Chandra, Uday, "Kol, Coolie, Colonial Subject: A Hidden History of Caste and the Making of Modern Bengal," in *Caste in Bengal: Histories of Hierarchy, Exclusion, and Resistance*, edited by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Tanika Sarkar. Permanent Black, 2023.

Das, Jahar Lal, *A Manual of Conservancy*, Calcutta: Butterworth, 1919.

Ferguson, Dean T, "Nightsoil and the 'Great Divergence': Human Waste, in the Urban Economy, and Economic Productivity, 1500-1900," *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 3 (2014): 379-402.

Goode, S. W., *Municipal Calcutta: Its Institutions in Their Origin and Growth*, Edinburgh: Corporation of Calcutta, 1916.

Lee, Joel, *Deceptive Majority: Hinduism, Untouchability, and Underground Religion*, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Sarkar, Tanika, "Calcutta's Underbelly, Corporation 'Methars' and Their Early Strikes," in *Caste in Bengal: Histories of Hierarchy, Exclusion, and Resistance*, edited by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Tanika Sarkar, Permanent Black, 2023. https://books.google.co.in/books?id=qy0V0AEACAAJ.

———, "Caste-Ing Servants in Colonial Calcutta," in *Servants' Pasts: Late-Eighteenth to Twentieth-Century South Asia*, edited by Nitin Sinha, Nitin Varma, and Pankaj Jha, Orient BlackSwan, 2019.

———, "'Dirty Work, Filthy Caste': Calcutta Scavengers in the 1920s," in *Working Lives & Worker Militancy: The Politics of Labour in Colonial India*, edited by Ravi Ahuja, Tulika Books, 2013.

———, "Making and Remaking of Caste and Labour - Calcutta Municipal Methars and Their Strikes in 1928," in *Kolkata in Space, Time, and Imagination Vol 1*, edited by Anuradha Roy and Melitta Waligora, Primus Book, 2019.

Sterndale, Reginald Craufuird, *Municipal Work in India - Hints on Sanitation: General Conservancy and Improvement in Municipalities, Towns, and Villages*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1881.

About the Author: Maria-Daniela Pomohaci is a doctoral student at the Centre for Modern Indian Studies (CeMIS), University of Göttingen, Germany. Her research focuses on the marginalized communities of sanitation workers ("scavengers") in late-colonial Calcutta, India. She holds an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Bucharest, Romania, where she completed a B.A. thesis on the evolution of the caste system in India. Following this, she earned a Master's degree in Sociology from the UNESCO Chair in Intercultural and Inter-religious Exchanges at the University of Bucharest, with an M.A. thesis examining the transformations of the caste system during the colonial period. In 2013, she moved to Göttingen to pursue a second Master's degree, this time in Modern Indian History at CeMIS. Her M.A. thesis addressed labor issues and Left politics in the context of workers' strikes in late-colonial Bengal. Since 2013, she has served as a Research Assistant at CeMIS, contributing to various projects related to education and labor in India, as well as managing archives of modern Indian history in Germany.

Contact: maria.pomohaci@gmail.com

Customary Practices and Law in India:
A Case for Legal Pluralism?

Praveen VERMA
Department of History
Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi

Abstract: This essay explores the interactions between customary law and state governance, revealing the complex relationships among power, identity, and law in contemporary India. It highlights the evolving nature of customs and the challenges faced by both dominant and marginalized communities. The analysis focuses on the Jat community's demand for the inclusion of sagotra marriage prohibitions in state law, illustrating how this demand exemplifies formal legal pluralism that reinforces their dominance in local politics. In contrast to marginalized groups seeking recognition of their norms, Khap Panchayats work to uphold traditional authority amid changing social dynamics.

Keywords: Legal Pluralism, Customary Law, Khap Panchayat, Sagotra Marriage, Colonialism.

Legal Pluralism: A Framework

Legal pluralism (LP) has emerged as a significant theme in socio-legal studies. Although various trends exist within LP, a common thread among them is the understanding that law encompasses much more than just state law. LP is characterized by the coexistence of multiple

normative systems and their interactions within the same social context, reflecting a fundamental aspect of everyday life.[1]

The modern history of LP emerged as a byproduct of colonialism and has persisted as a concept in post-colonial societies. The "civilized societies" of the West were historically associated with a unitary legal framework, while this notion was challenged in the colonies, where indigenous systems, customs, and local laws coexisted in diverse forms. Consequently, in post-colonial societies, the everyday realities of indigenous laws and customary practices in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific became central to the research of early Western anthropologists and ethnographers. Studies in the early twentieth century focused on the indigenous legal systems of tribal and village communities in colonized regions. Social scientists, particularly anthropologists, aimed to understand how these societies maintained social order without European legal frameworks.[2]

While the initial insights into legal pluralism were drawn from the 'exotic' and remote corners of the world, by the 21st century, the concept has transcended geographical boundaries and is no longer limited to those 'exotic societies.' In contemporary contexts, legal pluralism provides a comprehensive framework for understanding law in all its complexity. It encompasses not only indigenous legal forms in African villages or Southeast Asian tribes but also the pluralistic nature of law within advanced capitalist societies. The earlier emphasis of Western modernity on uniformity and homogenization has been critically examined, and it can no longer overlook the pluralistic aspects of law and society as a whole. Today, the colonial past serves merely as a point of reference in this discussion.

---

[1] Werner F. Menski, *Comparative law in a global context: the legal systems of Asia and Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

[2] S. Merry, "Legal Pluralism", in *Law and Society Review*, 22:5, 1988, pp. 869-896.

Legal Pluralism in India

To understand the modern history of legal pluralism (LP) in India, one must trace its colonial roots. The modern narrative of LP in India begins with the English East India Company and their voyages starting in 1772. The colonial experience has been pivotal in shaping LP, and it has persisted beyond the formal moment of independence, becoming one of the most enduring legacies of European expansion. Today, it characterizes a significant portion of the world's legal systems.

The focus within LP has shifted from examining the dynamics between dominant and subordinate groups to recognizing it as a phenomenon present in nearly all societies. LP is an observable reality; individuals understand themselves and their surroundings through the networks of social groups to which they belong, cultivating a sense of belonging within these boundaries. Communities perceive the connection between law and social life in its plural forms, deriving interpretive meanings from their social relations and practices. Law acts as a mediator in the self-regulation of communities, which is essential for fostering the kind of engagement that binds individuals together.[3]

Another important aspect of this debate is the belief that official law is not the only legal force operating within a specific field.[4] Society can be seen as a *semi-autonomous social field* (SASF) that possesses rule-making capacities and the means to induce or coerce compliance, while also being situated within a larger social matrix that can influence and intrude upon it – sometimes at the invitation of those within it, and sometimes independently.[5] In this context, the boundaries of the field are defined by a processual character.

---

[3] Ibidem.

[4] S. Moore, "Law and Social Change: The semi-autonomous social field as an appropriate subject of study", in *Law and Society Review*, 7:4, 1973, pp. 719-746.

[5] Ibidem.

SASF is a significant concept for understanding legal pluralism. By emphasizing the lack of autonomy, it highlights that different legal orders exist in relation to one another, affecting how each operates.[6] This perspective includes state, non-state, local, and indigenous laws, which interact, coexist, and influence each other. Additionally, SASF facilitates the development of hypotheses regarding the relationships between these various legal spheres.

State law not only penetrates and restructures other normative orders through symbols and direct coercion but also faces resistance from non-state normative orders that seek to circumvent or even capture the symbolic capital of state law. SASF recognizes the plurality of law within social contexts and the interactions and overlaps between different legal orders, thereby avoiding a rigid conceptualization of law.[7]

Some legal theorists reject the notion of legal centralism, arguing that LP is a fact while legal centralism is a myth – an ideal or illusion. Law functions as a means of self-regulation within SASF, where multiple legal orders coexist. The 'social science' view of LP as an empirical state of affairs within society, where various legal orders coexist in a social group without belonging to a single 'system'. In contrast, the 'juristic' view of LP as a specific problem of dual systems that arose when European countries imposed their legal frameworks on pre-existing systems.[8] A legal system is considered pluralistic in the juristic sense when the sovereign issues different bodies of law for various groups based on ethnicity, religion, nationality, or geography, with parallel legal regimes dependent on the state legal system. It is important to differentiate between formal LP

---

[6] M. Forsyth, *A Bird That Flies With Two Wings: Kastom and state justice systems in Vanuatu*, 2009, http://epress.anu.edu.au?p=49351.

[7] S. Merry, "Legal Pluralism", in *Law and Society Review*, 22:5, 1988, pp. 869-896.

[8] J. Griffiths, "What is Legal Pluralism?", in *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, 24, 1986, pp. 1-38.

and local/empirical LP. Empirical LP refers to the factual coexistence of state law and local law,[9] representing the community's social views and day-to-day practices. In contrast, formal LP pertains to the inclusion and recognition of local law within state law.

Given this framework, how do we locate Indian customary practices or local laws? This paper examines the customary practices of an agrarian community in North India known as the Jats and explores the interaction between state formal law and their own marital norms.

Customs and Social Structure among Jats

The Jats are primarily an agrarian community and represent the dominant caste group in the state of Haryana. They are numerically strong, own extensive cultivable land, and hold a prominent position in the local social hierarchy.[10] Their social organization is structured around various clans, which are grouped into councils known as Khap Panchayats.

Khap Panchayats (KPs) play a crucial role in regulating community members and defining their norms and customs. Recently, there has been a growing trend of young couples eloping to marry in defiance of the community's established marriage customs. Violations of these marital norms are seen as serious threats to the community's cohesion and honor, as marriage holds significant importance in the regulation of the Jat community. With the increasing frequency of such violations, couples face increasingly violent reactions from the KPs. These acts of violence, which can include the killing of the couple, are referred to as "honor crimes." In light of the rising incidence of these honor crimes, KPs have been advocating for the inclusion of one of their customary marriage

---

[9] A. Hoekema, "European Legal Encounters between Minority and Majority Culture: Cases of interlegality", in *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 51, 2005, pp. 1-28.

[10] M.N. Srinivas, "The Dominant Caste in Rampura", in *American Anthropologist*, New series, 61:1, 1959, pp. 1-16.

norms – a ban on *sagotra* marriages (marriages within the same clan) – under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955[11] (HMA).

The KPs' demand to recognize their marital custom as incestuous and therefore illegal under state law would establish a condition of formal legal pluralism, at least within the realm of marriage, where the local laws of the Jats would be incorporated into state law. This interaction between empirical legal pluralism, the local laws of the Jats, and formal legal pluralism – represented by their request for recognition of their marital customs within the state's legal framework – marks a significant shift for legal scholars.

While the Jat community aligns with Moore's concept of a semi-autonomous social field (SASF), the close relationship between Khap Panchayats (KPs) and the state in Haryana takes Moore's idea in a slightly different direction. Moore argues that external legislation has not had, nor can it be expected to have, the intended effects due to the semi-autonomy of social fields, where the ties of "mutual obligation" are often stronger and thus deflect the influence of external law. However, while the Jat community fits within the SASF framework, it challenges the notion that, '*mutual obligation… (that) deflects the operation of external law*'. The interaction between KPs and state legal forces does not consistently obstruct the functioning of external law. On the contrary, both colonial and post-colonial interactions with state forces have significantly contributed to the establishment and legitimacy of local law. As the dominant community with considerable influence over local governance, the two spheres work together to perpetuate the dominance of the Jats.

---

[11] The Hindu Marriage Act is a law in India that governs marriages among Hindus. It provides rules and regulations for solemnizing and registering marriages. The Act specifies conditions for a valid marriage, rights, and obligations of spouses, and ground for divorces.

In this context, the idea of legal pluralism (LP) is not being applied to the demands for recognition of customary rights by a marginalized community seeking to preserve its identity. Instead, it is being invoked by a powerful community that aims to maintain the status quo and further consolidate its power. Previous conceptions of LP have not adequately addressed the dynamics of dominant communities like the Jats and their political structures, such as Khap Panchayats (KPs). Their demand for inclusion within state law is more a plea for incorporation than a request for recognition, as seen in marginalized communities like Indigenous Peoples. Although similar claims to distinctiveness of community norms are made, these assertions, stemming from a position of dominance, ultimately serve to reinforce their power.

The social organization of the Jats and their clan councils, known as Khap Panchayats (KPs), operates within a complex system of exogamous and endogamous relations that define and produce hierarchy through cultural concepts such as *aika* (unity), *izzat* (honor), and *bhaichara* (brotherhood). In this context, the ideology of honor is gendered, with women perceived as the bearers of the community's honor, necessitating constant control. There is turbulence within the cultural sphere of the Jat community, influenced by shifting material conditions. Furthermore, the state's response is contradictory; while local state institutions often support the rulings of KPs, centralized state institutions have challenged their legitimacy, often with the active intervention of NGOs and other civil society organisations.

The demand for the inclusion of the prohibition on sagotra marriages within state law can be viewed as a request for space within the state's

legal framework, thereby representing a case of formal legal pluralism.[12] Incorporating local law into state law creates a scenario of formal LP, which ultimately has practical implications for the daily lives of the community. Since this demand seeks to include one of the many Jat norms in the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 (HMA), it suggests that it is more a call for inclusion within state law than a request for recognition of their distinct customs.

This is further supported by examining how the leaders of Khap Panchayats frame their customs and norms in a manner that aligns closely with the logic of state recognition. By recognizing cultures and identities as distinct and unique, the state effectively assumes that these cultures are static, thereby freezing them through the act of recognition. This freezing of cultural practices is necessary to establish the "exclusivity" of a community like the Jats, as distinctiveness cannot be based on fluidity but must instead be "well defined" and "specific." These qualifiers imply a structural neatness that should not be assumed in descriptive theory.[13] However, customs are not inherently invariant; they are, by nature, subject to change.

Marriage customs play a vital role in regulating the conduct of members of the Jat community, closely linked to the concept of honor. Within the community, members recognize certain rules of conduct as binding, although these rules are subject to change. The community does not have fixed boundaries for regulating behavior; instead, norms are fluid and can be reshaped through negotiation based on varying circumstances and social experiences. The process of establishing

---

[12] A. Hoekema, "European Legal Encounters between Minority and Majority Culture: Cases of interlegality", in *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 51, 2005, pp. 1-28.
[13] E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

boundaries began during the colonial period with codification and institutionalization, continuing along similar lines in the post-colonial era. Community leaders, who hold dominant positions not only within the community but also in the broader political landscape of Haryana through electoral politics, employ reasoning similar to that used during the colonial period in the process of codification to define themselves as a distinct community.

Shifting Bases of Customs and Norms

The emergence of Jat identity as a dominant caste in Haryana, particularly in relation to the colonial state, was largely based on land ownership. While the colonial state practiced a policy of non-intervention in the daily lives of the Jats and recognized their customary law mechanisms, this also shaped the form that customary law took. KPs' customary laws were not simply left untouched; they were transformed within the colonial context. The codification process during the colonial period institutionalized these laws. By recognizing certain norms and customs while introducing new elements, codification actively contributed to the construction of a Jat identity. For instance, the designation of Jats as a "martial race" significantly elevated their social status from that of a marginalized community to a dominant one in the local context. Additionally, the Jats' dominance in Haryana was facilitated by the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900, which designated only 15 caste groups as eligible for land ownership, effectively excluding the majority of other castes. Among these recognized groups, the Jats received the largest share of land, allowing them to establish dominance in subsequent years.

In post-colonial India, the nature of the state shifted from that of a colonizer to an independent government. However, the fundamental framework remained unchanged, and the post-colonial state continued to

adopt a policy of non-intervention in the daily practices of the Jats. The Jats were allowed to follow their own rules and regulations within their communities. Given their already dominant position, electoral politics provided a new avenue for power, leveraging their numerical strength to gain dominance in state politics, particularly at the regional level. Since Haryana was carved out of Punjab in 1966, it has consistently had a Jat Chief Minister. Participation in electoral politics allowed the Jats to extend their influence beyond their community to other castes and groups in the region. This was further accompanied by a broader acceptance of their norms and customs as "normal" and part of popular culture. For instance, their practice of hypergamy has been adopted by other communities in Haryana, in addition to the Jats.

Individuals who have attained leadership positions through these means, while also operating outside traditional institutions, consolidate their power by engaging with the KPs as well. These two levels of leadership complement each other, as they wield influence within the traditional system while participating in the broader political sphere, and vice versa. A person who has strengthened their position outside the community system often seeks to attain status within the traditional framework. To do this, they must adhere to the norms set by the KP's ideology, thus reinforcing their belief in the system and upholding its authority. Furthermore, the prestige and political ascendency of such individuals are leveraged by traditional councils to command allegiance and exercise social control, both within the community and in inter-caste relations, as well as at a broader political level.

The introduction of neoliberal reforms in 1991 and the subsequent opening up of the economy have played a significant role in reshaping the Jat community. The social and economic changes brought about by the onset of the neoliberal era greatly impacted the entire landscape of Haryana. Consequently, the community is undergoing a process of

reorganization to adapt to these changes, marking a shift in land use patterns. Previously, land was regarded as *dharti maa* (mother earth) and *aan-dhatri* (food giver), closely tied to concepts of honor. However, it has now been transformed into a commodity primarily associated with economic value. Land is increasingly viewed as an economic asset, particularly for industrial development and real estate. These sectors have been bolstered by economic reforms, leading to a proliferation of urban centers and large-scale foreign investment in industries. As demand for land has surged, its value has skyrocketed.

This shift, coupled with decreasing agricultural profitability, has led many to sell their land, further reducing the amount of agricultural land available. The transformation of land from being regarded as “mother earth” to a mere commodity has also altered the relationship between the community and the land. Previously centered on land and primarily identifying as an agrarian community, this recent change has weakened community ties, giving rise to dissenting voices against certain customs, including marriage norms. The dispossession of land thus becomes a significant entry point for conflict within the community.

Moreover, factors such as modern education and the emergence of new opportunities outside the agrarian economy have led community members to develop social ties beyond the traditional structure. In pursuing status roles outside the traditional system, individuals are not necessarily bound to adhere to the traditional code of values. While electoral politics has served to strengthen and expand the Jats' dominance in Haryana, the dispossession of land has eroded the material foundation of the community. The impact of these changes on community ties has led to turbulence within the norms and customs of the community and, more broadly, within the cultural sphere. Changes in one area inevitably influence the other; cultural norms and customs cannot be viewed in isolation from their social and material bases.

However, Khap Panchayat leaders, in their effort to maintain control over the community, are often seen as resisting the re-envisioning of cultural norms. They are keen to preserve the status quo that has allowed them to retain their power and influence. The political success of the Jats in local politics has resulted in a close intermingling of KPs with local state bodies. The next section will examine this aspect further.

The relationship between State and Customary Governance

The spheres of governance of KPs and the state become intermingled at the local level. Given that Jats occupy a majority of local state offices – such as those in the police, administration, and local legislative bodies – KPs exert significant influence over local governance. Through this mechanism, KPs appropriate the state's prerogative to define justice and rights. Consequently, the definitions of justice and rights in this region are heavily influenced by the perspectives of the KPs. For instance, state schemes aimed at empowering women are often undermined and not implemented when opposed by KPs, with minimal intervention from the state. Occasionally, local administrations also refuse to engage with the rulings issued by KPs.

Sooraj Singh, the headman of a Khap Panchayat, explains that KPs are vested with a *divine right* to adjudicate marriages that transgress caste or community norms. He states, "We cannot allow love (choice) marriages and do not recognize court marriages either."[14] Such transgressions across caste boundaries invite punitive actions. The governance of the community by KPs includes resolving disputes between community members as well as issuing authoritative pronouncements on matters they believe impact the community's honor, ensuring the enforcement of these decisions.

[14] Interview with Sooraj Singh, conducted by the author on 14th April 2017.

Negotiation with State Law

The demand for the inclusion of their marital custom to prohibit sagotra marriages within the Jat community – deeming them incestuous and therefore prohibited under state law – can be understood in the context of the turbulence resulting from the changing material base of the Jats.

An important element that emerged from discussions among Khap Panchayat leaders regarding honor crimes was the sense of pride and achievement they felt in punishing those deemed "guilty." KPs strongly advocate for the punishment of individuals who violate the community's social norms, believing that such actions serve as a deterrent for others. They openly defend the right of local communities, such as the Jats, to discipline anyone who breaches these rules and the code of honor. In instances of violence, KPs view the 'executions' and 'just punishments' meted out for violating caste norms and the community's honor as necessary. This violence has two dimensions: while state law considers these actions 'barbaric' and 'disgraceful,' KPs deem them 'essential' for maintaining the community's honor. Influential KP leader Shieshpal Beniwal explains, "The loss from killing those who transgress community norms will affect only one percent of members, but the other ninety-nine percent will learn not to break these norms."[15] In such instances, KPs prioritize the *izzat* (honor) of the village and caste, viewing individuals involved in violent acts not as criminals but with respect.

The ideological and cultural patterns underpinning the concept of honor are closely linked to material realities. Indeed, under the altered political economy of post-independence India, material conditions have gained even greater significance in the functioning of honor. With the legal rights granted to women regarding inheritance and the freedom to choose their marriage partners, the question of honor has emerged

[15] Interview with Shieshpal Beniwal, conducted by the author on 14th April 2017.

prominently. One of the significant changes that reinforced the so-called concept of honor is the enactment of the Hindu Succession Act of 1956. For the first time, this Act enabled daughters, sisters, widows, and mothers, alongside male members, to inherit land with full proprietary rights. This development has generated considerable anxiety within rural society. The proper implementation of the Act poses a threat to the patrilineal and patriarchal systems that control property.

The Act significantly impacted the code of honor governing marriage alliances, particularly village exogamy and caste endogamy. For example, land in the village is traditionally regarded as belonging to the male descendants of the ancestors who originally settled and cultivated it. Only male agnatic descendants, as members of localized clans, are considered to have revisionary rights to the estate, and land is typically not to be alienated outside this group.

The only accepted pattern of inheritance is one that occurs from males to males. This perspective means that daughters and sisters, who could introduce fresh blood and new descent lines through their husbands, are discouraged from exercising their inheritance rights. The presence of a married daughter in the natal village poses a threat to patrilineal inheritance, as it could facilitate her claim to inherited land. This concern has significantly contributed to the Khap Panchayats' demand for an amendment to the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, which currently permits such marriages. They seek to classify these marriages as incestuous instead.

In this context, incest is defined broadly, encompassing all inhabitants of a village and all gotras represented within it, including those from neighboring villages. This creates a fictive brother-sister relationship among them. However, the specific demand being made to the state is to officially recognize and declare *sagotra* (within the same clan) or intra-gotra marriages as incestuous and to prohibit them. Any

breach of this norm is treated as a serious transgression and is dealt with swiftly. It is important to note that the charge of incest is not uniformly applied to all caste groups within the village. If one of the parties involved is from a different caste, the issue shifts from being one of incest to being framed as a caste matter.

The concept of incest is not applied to family relationships that involve unequal power dynamics between senior male members and junior female members, or any other prohibited categories. This distinction creates a contrast between fictitious and real incest.

Khap Panchayats (KPs) are clearly uncomfortable and unwilling to confront the issue of incest within families. However, their strict prohibitions regarding the broad and ambiguous interpretation of incest reflect the importance of land and property in regulating marriage and sexual norms. Moreover, given that KPs stem from powerful and affluent segments of the community, their selective application of the incest category in relation to State law indicates its use as a tool for mobilizing the Jat community, thereby reinforcing the authority of Khap leaders.

The Hindu Succession Act provoked significant tension within rural society, leading landowners in Haryana and Punjab to unite in their urgency to reject it to preserve their "honor" and "timeless customs and norms." They sought to abolish the Act through legislative means while simultaneously intensifying their efforts through KPs to manage its repercussions. Consequently, there were three to four attempts made in the State legislative assembly (in 1967, 1977, 1979, and 1989), all of which were unsuccessful. The recent demand by KPs to amend the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 represents yet another attempt, but this time driven by different motivations. Unlike the earlier confrontations prompted by the Hindu Succession Act, the State has not played an active role in "taking away" their right to self-governance. Instead, this

current demand to declare sagotra marriages as incestuous has emerged from within the community itself.

The confrontation has been intensified by the involvement of civil society and NGOs, which have challenged the authority of Khap Panchayats (KPs) to issue verdicts against individuals exercising their free will to marry. They demand accountability for KP leaders as well as for the culprits, who are often family members. The classification of "honor crimes" as a form of violence against women has highlighted the role of sanctioned violence in caste courts across India. Various political and social campaigns against honor crimes assert that KPs are illegal entities and call for State intervention to prevent these bodies from infringing upon individual liberties. In fact, one court has even denied the existence of KPs.

The All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) has been active in the campaign against honor crimes. In an interview, Jagmati Sangwan, the State president, remarked, "A few years ago, no one was willing to address the issue of honor crimes in the public sphere, as it was socially acceptable to kill women in the name of honor, with the belief that such actions would restore status."[16] She further explained that the demand for including a ban on sagotra marriages in the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 has arisen from a political vacuum. KP leaders have failed to recognize the internal dynamics of the community, and the loss of the material base of customs and norms – namely, land – has not prompted any reevaluation of their practices.

In this complex landscape, State and customary law are intricately intertwined. On one hand, the transformation of caste or community violations into violent crimes against transgressors, often without significant legal repercussions, illustrates how the politics of honor

[16] Interview with Jagmati Sangwan, conducted by the author in June 2017.

supersedes State law. On the other hand, it is ironic that State law is sometimes strategically employed by perpetrators to evade legal consequences, as police may fail to take action against them. This situation disrupts the understanding of legal pluralism, where there is ongoing interaction – sometimes overlapping and at other times conflicting – between State and customary law, such that neither can be comprehensively understood without considering the other.

In post-colonial legal contexts, the case of the Jat community and the Khap Panchayats' demand to include their marriage norms illustrates how a dominant community seeks to establish a form of formal legal pluralism. This inclusion would further entrench their already powerful position within both local and broader political spheres. This scenario stands in stark contrast to marginalized communities, such as Indigenous peoples or Adivasis in India, who advocate for the incorporation of their local laws and norms into State law from a place of historical marginalization.

Conclusion

The Jat community's demand for the inclusion of sagotra marriage prohibitions within state law exemplifies the dynamics of formal legal pluralism, reinforcing their dominant position in local and political spheres. This contrasts sharply with marginalized communities seeking recognition of their norms from a history of exclusion. As Khap Panchayats navigate the complexities of customary law and state governance, their efforts reflect a struggle to maintain traditional authority amidst shifting social realities. Ultimately, these interactions highlight the interplay between power, identity, and law in contemporary India, underscoring the evolving nature of customs and the challenges faced by both dominant and marginalised groups.

References:

Baxi, P., S. Rai and S. S. Ali, "Legacies of Common Law: Crimes of honour in India and Pakistan" in *Third World Quarterly*, 27:7, 2006, pp. 1239-1253.

Carroll, L., "Daughter's Rights of Inheritance in India: A perspective of the problem of dowry" in *Modern Asian Studies*, 25:4, 1991, pp. 781-809.

Chowdhary, P., *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender, caste and patriarchy in northern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Forsyth, M., *A Bird That Flies With Two Wings: Kastom and state justice systems in Vanuatu*, 2009, http://epress.anu.edu.au?p=49351.

Galanter, M., "Justice in Many Rooms: Courts, private ordering and indigenous law" in *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, 19, 1981, pp. 1-47.

---, *Law and Society in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Hobsbawm, E. and T. Ranger (Eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Griffiths, J., "What is Legal Pluralism?", in *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, 24, 1986, pp. 1-38.

Hoekema, A., "European Legal Encounters between Minority and Majority Culture: Cases of interlegality", in *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 51, 2005, pp. 1-28.

Menski, Werner F., *Comparative law in a global context: the legal systems of Asia and Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Merry, S., "Legal Pluralism", in *Law and Society Review*, 22:5, 1988, pp. 869-896.

---, "From Law and Colonialism to Law and Globlization", in *Law and Social enquiry,* 28: 2, 2003, pp. 569-590.

Moore, S., "Law and Social Change: The semi-autonomous social field as an appropriate subject of study", in *Law and Society Review*, 7:4, 1973, pp. 719-746.

---, *Law as a process: An anthropological approach*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

Pradhan, M.C., *The Political System of the Jats of Northern India*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Srinivas, M.N., “The Dominant Caste in Rampura”, in *American Anthropologist*, New series, 61:1, 1959, pp. 1-16.

Yadav, B., “Khap Panchayat: Stealing freedom?”, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44:52, 2009, pp. 16-19.

About the Author:

Praveen Verma teaches history at the University of Delhi, where he completed his PhD in the Department of History. He holds two master’s degrees – one in history from the University of Delhi and another in the sociology of law from the University of the Basque Country, Spain. His research interests lie at the intersection of law, caste, agrarian history, and sports.

Contact: praveen@svc.ac.in

REVIEWS

William Dalrymple, *The Golden Road. How Ancient India Transformed the World*, London: Bloomsbury, 2024, 496 p., ISBN: 9781408864418.

Florina DOBRE-BRAT
Independent Researcher

Extensive research and scholarship on Indian studies, spanning from linguistics to applied sciences is now drawing to a nearly three-century prolific scholarly tradition. There has been so much said about the seminal role of the full-fledged Indian cultural traditions across whole of Asia and the whole world. But how the ideas, religious beliefs and scientific discoveries have spread, were imported or transferred along newly established commercial trade routes to territories further away from India in the east and the west of the world from the third century to the twelfth century CE and how those evolved into forms that surpassed the original models is what William Dalrymple displays with unparalleled raconteur skills in his most recent book, *The Golden Road*, over ten dense chapters that each take the reader on a marvellous journey. Comparing India to what Greece' pivotal role meant in the Mediterranean world sets the framework of understanding the dynamics of these transfers.

> "What Greece was first to Rome, then to the rest of the Mediterranean and European world, so at this period India was to South-east and Central Asia and even to China, radiating out and diffusing its philosophies, political ideas and architectural forms out over an entire region, not by conquest but instead by sheer cultural allure and sophistication." (p. 4)

The geographical position of India in the whole Asian continent along with the incommensurable help of the winds of the Asian monsoon is what put India "at the centre of a great network of navigable sea roads and maritime trade routes." (p. 4) These maritime routes were beneficial in so many ways as winds made "travel over long distances not only possible but also remarkably fast" and the sea a place that "did not divide as much as unite." (p. 7) Also, never before the roads stretching from the Red Sea to the Pacific and linking diverse people and places into a single cultural unit have been given a name, and so this is precisely what Dalrymple does and confidently calls it *Golden Road*. With all these in mind, it is now a lot easier to picture India as the heart of what Dalrymple calls the *Indosphere*.[1]

What systematically obscured or obliterated India's importance as a central economic and cultural hub of Asia was the well promoted Sinocentric concept of the 'Silk Road,' a land trade route said to cut across Asia from China to Turkey and the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. In fact, according to Dalrymple and others,[2] the concept is relatively new as there are no references to it in antiquity or in the medieval times. There are no mentions of it either in Marco Polo's travels notes. It is surprisingly a rather early modern coinage of Prussian geographer, Baron von Richthofen who was charged with planning – Dalrymple uses a less practical verb, i.e. 'dreaming' – a route for a railway that could possibly link Berlin with Beijing "with a view to establishing German colonies and infrastructure projects in the region." (p. 17) The name he has chosen was

---

[1] I personally think that the concept of Indosphere is, up to a certain extent, well complementing the concept of Sheldon Pollock's *Sanskrit Cosmopolis* as shown in *The language of Gods in the World of Men,* Berkeley, 2003, where Sanskrit is shown to be the lingua franca of all South-east countries territories that have embraced Buddhism or forms of Hinduism.

[2] Warwick Ball, *Rome in the East*, London, 2016; *Gandhāra Perceptions: The Orbit of Gandhāran Studies*, Oxford, 2020.

die Seindenstraßen, the Silk Roads. The name 'Silk Road' appeared in English as the title of a popular Swedish explorer, Sven Hedin, and it was much appealing. However, more recently, thanks to a consistent economic support and political influx coming from President Xi Jinping of China, the 'Silk Road' as a part of the Belt and Road Initiative was promoted even more.[3]

The book opens with a glance at the surviving mirabilia of the earliest Buddhist places and caves from Ajanta, Karle and Bhaja in today's Maharashtra in Deccan of which architectural features have been preserved and used later in building monasteries from Himalayas to Afghanistan, China and Japan and to all South-east Asia. The story of the birth of Buddhism in the fifth century BCE as a largely democratic reaction to highly hierarchical, tedious and sophisticated Vedic ritual-based ceremonies as a sole guarantor of dharma and merit (*puṇya*) continues with records of the encounters between the Greek Alexander and Buddhist and Jains monks in Northern India. This was a key element in the dynamics of Buddhism spreading throughout Central and Minor Asia. The great emperor Ashoka embraced the new faith and diligently carried out systematic actions, carefully recorded on stone in the form of edicts, meant to spread and support the *Buddhavācana* (teachings). He sent missionaries carrying relics in all directions:

> "east to Burma and Suvarnabhumi, the Lands of Gold dotting the oceans of South-east Asia; north to the steppe nomads in Central Asia; and north-west to the Hellenistic patchwork of Seleucid and Ptolemaic Greek states that had been left scattered by the death of Alexander, from Afghanistan to Cyrene on the North African coast of the Mediterranean." (p. 40)

---

[3] At some point Dalrymple notes briefly but poignantly: "In contrast to India, China has become very good at telling the story that it was always the centre of the Asian world." (p. 20)

He sent his own son and daughter to the south to his ally Devanampiya Tissa, the raja of Sri Lanka. Buddhism, unlike the staunch orthodox Brahmanism, did not restrict travels and contact with people of various religious backgrounds and walks of life. The flourishing Buddhist monasteries dotting the great swathes of Asia were supported by rich tradesmen and were “acting as urban enclaves in the countryside” thus helping a network of trade routes and facilitating safe passage.

From the time of Augustus (r. 31 BCE-14 CE) for several centuries, Rome and ancient India were major trading partners. Rome’s economic trade with India was far more consistent than with China. The Battle of Actium reconfigured the Roman-Indian trade as Rome got access to the Red Sea ports; such was the famous Berenike, by incorporating Egypt into the empire. Rome got also full possession of Alexandria as a full hub where goods from India and Red Sea were received, and from where they were exported across the Mediterranean to Rome and beyond. Indian luxuries were in great demand at Rome and across the empire. From precious stones as diamonds, rubies, amethysts and onyx to ivory, expensive hard wood as ebony and teak, sandalwood, coral, Indian cotton and Chinese silk, other rich textiles to saddles and a latest invention – stirrups, all sorts of exotic goods and animals were all filling long lists of customs tariffs in Alexandria and at the same time irking the patriotism of austere Roman senators and statemen such as Pliny the Elder who lamented over the Roman gold stuffing the Indian tradesmen’s pockets. By the end of the first century CE, Indian spices were readily available. Apicius mentions pepper as an ingredient in eighty percent of the 478 recipes of his famous cookbook, *De re culinaria.* There are plenty of examples all over Kerala and Coromandel coast of archaeological finds such as Roman empire goods (pottery, glass, silverware), and coins to attest the prosperous trade between India and Roman empire. Along with the goods and merchants, new ways and

beliefs were travelling both ways. Christianity as brought and preached about by St Thomas on the Coromandel Coast was one of them.

The following third chapter returns to Northern India to have a close look at the fascinating iconographic and sculptural expressions of the Buddhist Gandhāra art. Dalrymple supports the idea that this style is particularly indebted to the itinerant sculptors of the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire who could have collaborated with and instructed local craftsmen. The pivotal role of the northern eastern part of India have had in spreading the Buddhism in the Himalayas is shown by the fact that the fourth Buddhist council is held in Kashmir during Kanishka of the Kushan kings whose reign extended at its apex from Uzbekistan to modern Allahabad in north India. It was the western northern parts of India which were in close contact with Greek philosophies as it happened in learned Buddhist monasteries (*vihāras*) in Taxila (once a Bactrian city) where school of highly abstract Buddhist thought developed and evolved over the next couple of centuries. It was down to two brother monks from near Peshawar, Asaṅga (c. 320-390) and Vasubandhu to significantly contribute to the development of the cult of Maitreya and by it in transforming Buddhism into the larger, more eclectic and accommodating way, – Mahāyāna –, as it moved to the north and east towards China and Japan. A step further into making the sacred Buddhist text more accessible to China is made by Kumārajīva (344-413) a most learned and prolific scholar and monk half-Indian, half-Kucha[4] by his Kucha princess mother. He has translated from Sanskrit into Chinese complex Mahāyāna Buddhist texts in clear renderings unburdened by very technical vocabulary that have endured time and are still in use today as is the *Lotus Sūtra*.

[4] Kucha people in the western part of today China spoke the easternmost Indo-European language, known also as Kuchean-Tocharian which is now extinct.

Dalrymple chooses next to guide the reader through the incredible nine storeys-high great library of Nālandā within the well-known Nālandā Vihāra. It was unmistakably the most sought-after place of high learning. All Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhist scholars' eyes were set upon it. Perilous journeys of thousands of miles long such as the one undertaken by the Chinese monk Xuanzang in 626 CE is one amazing example of arduous dedication and commitment to obtaining access to the teachings and texts of certain philosophical traditions. According to his travel book, *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*, "the most comprehensive account of the seventh-century Central Asia and India ever produced," (p. 106) at the time of his passing by other famous Buddhist centres, the Naw Bahar (the New Monastery) in Balkh, Bamiyan and eventually arriving in Gandhāra, he cannot help to observe that sad decayed state of falling of many Buddhist holy places, dilapidated and fewer monasteries and less brethren monks. He holds responsible for these the raids and plunders of the White Huns led by Mihirakula (d. 542 CE), but an equally important part to play in it were the Gupta kings that had on their agenda the revival of Brahmanism under a new form centred around devotion to newly rising Shiva and Vishnu gods and Mother Goddess, that will be known as Puranic Hinduism. Xuanzang will study under the great metaphysician scholar Śīlabhadra and will eventually return to China carrying with him lots of manuscripts. The famous monk and his treasures will be given a proper place in form of the Great Wild Goose Pagoda, a 210-foot-tall spectacular sūtra library that still stands in the centre of Xi'an today.

Nevertheless, in the fifth chapter we see how Buddhism will be also used as an instrument and a political weapon in the hands of the only woman to become Emperor of China in her own right, Wu Zetian, who has ascended to the throne from the rather low position of the fifth ranked emperor's concubine using all possible means, executions,

tortures and horrific murders included. Over her half-century long reign, she was a liberal patron and lavished munificent gifts to Buddhist monasteries and to monks coming from across the Buddhist world, but mostly from India amongst which Yogācāra master Bodhiruci remains a peculiar figure. The close entourage of the empress of Buddhist high priests and much learned Buddhist scholars was necessary to support and serve the imperial propaganda that some Buddhist texts had certain prophetic references to the empress to create thus perfect legitimacy of her rule. By the end of her reign, there were the 200,000 fascicles of hand-copied books in the Institute for Advancement in Literature in Chang'an, which surpassed even the biggest libraries in Byzantium. It was a momentous time where the civilisations of India and China were 'bound together so intimately' and when Buddhism enjoyed the imperial Chinese patronage as never before or after.

How the plethora of gods as represented on the sculptures of Mamallapuram or Mahabalipuram near Madras/Chennai made during the Pallava kings have found a new abode all the way in the Mekong Delta in Cambodia as seen in the old cities of Angkor Borei and Phom Da near the ancient port Oc Eo in Vietnam, also known as Funan, is equally related to the dynamics of the maritime trade routes. Starting from early seventh century the ascending Arab Islamic conquest was causing more fracture into the Byzantine Empire and had a severe negative impact on the Indo-Roman maritime commerce. Henceforth the Golden Road to the west began to close up, but the eastern branch going beyond the Strait of Malacca all the way to Korea and Japan to what is called the lands of gold (Suvarṇabhūmi) grew ever more important.

Alongside with gods and goddesses, the south Indian of the Pallava kings have also 'exported' along their eastern maritime trade routes Tantric traditions both Buddhist and Hindu. However, from the sixth century CE a conspicuous melange between Buddhism and Hinduism

becomes a distinctive feature of all South-east Asian religions. One of the most spectacular architectural complex Buddhist structure, Borobudur from as far as Java is highly indebted to the eccentric figure of the Buddhist monk Vajrabodhi, once a Pallava prince, “a wonder-working Buddhist monk and custodian of secret texts.” (p. 187) The construction of the mandala-shaped step pyramid of Borobudur begun around 760 and was completed in 830 CE based on the plans of Vajrabodhi who travelled from Nālandā to Kanchipuram and from there to Sri Lanka by 717 CE to Sumatra, then a central part of the maritime empire of Srivijaya, the principal power in South-east Asia and major source of perfumes, spices, resin and other exotic gods for India and China.

The cults of Hindu gods and goddess into the South-east Asia kingdoms brought along the commercial roads required also correct traditional theological guidance. Significant numbers of the Brahmin priests from India who must have put aside the fear of pollution started travelling overseas. It is not exactly known whether they came on their own initiative or at the invitations of the kings and chieftains of the kingdoms across the breath of the monsoon Asia who were looking for Indian and political models, and all were taken by the fifth century the names of Hindu gods as stated by the most orthodox Brahmanical dharma texts, the *Laws of Manu* (*Manu smṛti*). If not for the seductive and appealing promise of riches and fortunes of the Suvarṇabhūmi (golden lands), they seem to have enjoyed ‘special reverence’ at least. They also brought with them the great epics of Mahābhārata and Rāmayāṇa, mythologies and all arts from dance (*nāṭyaśāstra*) to building temples (*śilpaśāstra*). Sanskrit, “the language of Gods in the world of men” was adopted as the language of the cultural elites and of the political government. The scripts too were highly indebted to Indian scripts as Brāhmī or the Pallava-style Brāhmī letters of South India and those became the basis for almost every pre-Islamic script in South-east

Asia: Khmer, Javanese, Kawi, Lontara, Lao, Thai, Cham and Malay. What was built with much zeal to recreate the great deeds of the epics' heroes overpassed the original model. There are so many examples,[5] but amongst them all, Dalrymple presents the exquisite and fabulous complex of Angkor Wat in Cambodia as "the most spectacular of all Indic temples and the largest religious structures built anywhere in the ancient or medieval world." (p. 228)

In the last two chapters, William Dalrymple tells the fascinating story of how Indian's mind devised mathematical abstractions of groups and sums into symbols called numbers which thus simplified algebraic operations, made possible algorithms, contributed to trigonometry and astronomy. The concept of zero also triggered a whole revolution of calculus. From the mid seventh century CE the new rising power of Islamic Arabs reshaped the world and thus facilitated different channels of cultural transmission.

> "As the conquest of northern India by the Kushan open the way for the Buddhist conquest of China, so the Ummayyad Arab conquest of Central Asia and its absorption into the wider Islamic world has opened the way for Indian learning to seduce the western minds with its brilliance and sophistication." (p. 247)

Dalrymple shows how so much of the India's fertile ideas on mathematics, astronomy, and medicine (all very pragmatical fields) and philosophy were passed on to the Islamic world thanks to a family of Sanskrit-literate hereditary Buddhist abbots from Afghanistan (the Naw

---

[5] The 240 shrines and temples of Prambanam in Java built around the end of the eight century with the 35 meter high tower shikhara richly carved and ornate, the impressive City of Shiva (Ishanapura) – based on the Shivait paśupata tradition – in central Cambodia kingdom of Chenla, now pretty much lost to the jungle, the Bamyan Buddhas from Afghanistan, which unfortunately, today no longer witness to the world what a rich Buddhist tradition developed in that region, and many more now lost or partially in ruins.

Bahar monastery), the Barmakids, who had eventually converted to Islam. They studied in Kashmir, Ujjain and other centres of learning from India, but from the position of hostages they became the leading figures of the Abbasid Baghdad in the late eight century. From Baghdad – a former Christian place much fertilised by the Hellenistic culture –, where many Sanskrit texts were translated into Arabic, these ideas spread across the Islamic world from Central Asia to Spain. When they reach Europe and were used by some brilliant minds such was Leonardo of Pisa, also known as Fibonacci but it was not until under the visionary monarch Frederic II the 'Stupor Mundi' (1194-1250) when the use of the Indo-Arabic numerals became normalised and began to spread to the rest of Europe. Dalrymple also points out at the links between the first universities in Europe and the madrassas – the Islamic centres of learning, which at their turn must have surely been designed after the Buddhist viharas from central Asia that fell under Islamic conquest.

The Golden Road is a wealth of knowledge. Three-hundreds of extremely dense, yet fresh pages of cultural history are backed by copiously, yet sagaciously researched notes and an erudite bibliography. Dalrymple revisits the colonial narrative of an India characterised by paganism and barbarism hence in need to be civilised. However, he does not do it with the intention to raise an encomiastic *laudatio* of the greatness of India alone at the expense of all other cultures it came in contact and cohabited with for centuries as it happened in the past when the idea of an India as a super civilising imperialistic power met with resistance and opposition from many South-east states. Fragmentation of the studies into the spread of Buddhism in Central Asia China and those related to spread of Indian and Hindu culture in the south and eastern regions have also hindered the whole perspective of the prominent role that India has played in the region.

The Golden Road is undoubtedly a must read for understanding the complexities of economic, cultural and religious influence that India played in the region from the third century BCE to twelve century BC, that, to these days, has still got the strength to cause significant waves across the whole Asian continent.

About the Author:

Florina Dobre-Brat has a master's degree in Sanskrit from the University of Pune, India. In 2007 she has been awarded a Ph.D. in Philosophy by the Institute of Philosophy of the Romanian Academy for a thesis on the fifth century CE grammarian-philosopher Bhartṛhari's contribution to philosophy of language in India. Alongside working for over twenty years with the Central Library of the University of Bucharest and I.C. Petrescu National Pedagogical Library, between 2011-2018 she taught courses in Sanskrit, Classical Indian culture and civilization, and Indian Classical Literature at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Modern Languages and Classics. Some of the published papers covering her areas of expertise are available at https://unibuc.academia.edu/InaBrat. She lives now in Scotland with her family.

Contact: inabrat79@gmail.com

William Dalrymple, *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, 522 p., ISBN: 978-1-4088-6439-5.

Florina DOBRE-BRAT
Independent Researcher

India is the land of much fascinating history. The rise of the East India Company (EIC) as the main, unrelented and not once reckless player on the economic market along with their increasing political power that largely contributed to the collapsing of the Indian Mughal Empire is what the Scottish historian William Dalrymple writes about with accomplished art in *The Anarchy*.

The book has been shortlisted for the Historical Writers Association Book Award 2020 and won the 2020 Arthur Ross Bronze medal from the US Council on Foreign Relations. It is also one of the four books that, together with *The Last Mughal* continued by *Return of a King* and followed by the *White Mughals* make the *Company Quartet* which tells of the Decline and the Fall of the Mughal Empire and the Rise of the East India Company. Dalrymple modestly describes the over-five hundred pages passionate account as merely

> "an attempt to answer the question of how a single business operation, based in the London office complex, managed to replace the mighty Mughal Empire as masters of the vast subcontinent between the years 1756 and 1803." (p. xxxvii)

The choice of the expression 'anarchy' originates in one of Mughal sources William Dalrymple based his research, the historian Fakir Khair ud-Din Illahabadi as a most eloquent description of what was the social and political situation in the 18th century India:

> "disorder and corruption no longer sought to hide themselves and the once peaceful realm of India became the abode of Anarchy (*dar al-amn-I Hindustan dar al-fitan gasht*)."

In constructing a powerful account of the EIC, Dalrymple resorts to first hand sources such as the voluminous records of the Company from London kept in the British Library, the scarcely visited eighteenth century Company's records preserved in National Archives of India in New Delhi, the highly educated Mughal historians (*munishis*) chronicles such as the *Seir Mutaqherin*, or *Review of Modern Times* by Ghulam Hussain Khan along with more obscure sources never translated before such as the *Ibrat Nama*, or the *Book of Admonition* by Fakir Khair ud-Din Illahabadi. The Mughal chronicles are masterly balanced by French largely untranslated and unused eighteen century memoirs of Gentil, Madec, Law and notably the *Voyages* of Comte Modave.

As wary as it may be, Dalrymple's advice not to read the history backwards, – a mistake in his opinion –, is yet an open invitation to mostly see how EIC was established and what it meant to be in its allegedly benign start off

> "for the honour of our native country and for the advancement of trade and merchandise within this realm of England." (p. 3)

It was in the Elizabethan England, right at the beginning of the sixteenth century when the idea of finding a new trading route, more profitable, or at least equally profitable as the Spanish, Portuguese and the Dutch expeditions, to bring in Britain the spices by buying them directly from the source in the East Indies, and no longer through the Middle Eastern middlemen. Unlike the Levant Company which was using the Middle Eastern connections and had a fixed board of fifty-three subscribers, the EIC was from the very start a joint stock corporation, open to all investors. A previous attempt at establishing a joint stock

company was made much earlier, in 1533, under the name of the Muscovy Company. Based on the hypothesis that the whole inhabited land was a big island, the idea behind it was to discover the north way to the reaches of the East Indies, all for England, without any interference from the Spanish and Portuguese. Although the geographical discoveries proved it wrong, the enterprise was somewhat successful in establishing the trading route with Persia via Russia.

Later, the Muscovy Company became a part of the Levant Company, but its ambitions were tempered by the Spanish peace talks entertained by the Privy Council of the Queen. When the Council has decreed otherwise and granted universal freedom of the seas and the right of all nations to send ships wherever they wished, the founders of the newly born East India Company were finally given the go-ahead with their enterprise. Thus, on 31st December 1600, the "Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading to East Indies," a group of 218 men, received their Royal Charter. (p. 9)

The period 1600 to 1755 is covered in the first substantial chapter. Thus, from the first successful expedition in 1603 when Lancaster four-ships fleet returned intact and fully loaded to London thanks also to pirating some Dutch vessels, the trading ambitions remained somehow steady, the EIC's profits were rather modest compared to VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compangnie*) Dutch East India Company which hold the monopoly for aromatic spices. The situation made EIC to focus on other Asian merchandise: fine cotton, textiles and chintzes which were plenty available in India. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, India whose population of 150 million represented the fifth of the world population was the world leader in textile manufacturing. No wonder the Mughal capitals were some of the largest cities in the world. Everything associated with Mughal was an expression of power, exquisite luxury and refinement, unthinkable wealth displayed in various

ways such was weighing the emperor in jewels on every one of his birthdays. Getting access to their market by establishing trade relationships was rather difficult to begin with. It took time and great skills of diplomacy to initiate the first contacts with the Mughal court and be granted a first short audience with Emperor Jahangir himself who was more interested in English curiosities than keen to harbour any sort of thoughts on commerce and trade with the English. However, the perseverance of Sir Thomas Roe, the ambassador of James I, who led Britain's first official diplomatic mission to India in 1615, brought eventually some results and an English factory (trading station) was built in Surat. A second one was built shortly at Masulipatnan, a port of the Deccan's Sultanate of Golconda, the rivals of the Moghuls. From here, over the next 200 years, the EIC has slowly learned the Mughal ways, and not only ousted its Portuguese, Dutch and French rivals but it conquered and subdued the Mughal themselves.

The first fortified base of the EIC was built near a fishermen village called Madraspatnam, known later simply as Madras, and enjoyed a thirty-year freedom of customs duty. It thus attracted a considerable number of weavers and tradesmen. It was a matter of a couple of decades until the settlement had grown into the very first English colonial town in India of a population of 40 000 with its own civil administration. A second English colonial town, on "the island of Bumbye" came into the hands of EIC through the Crown as a part of the dowry brought by Infanta Catherine de Braganza to her husband Charles II, king of England. Despite a bumpy handover from the Portuguese to English, before long, Bombay has proven its worth as one of the best natural harbours of South Asia and shortly became the Company's major naval base in Asia.

In less than a century after its foundation, in 1693 the Company grew sufficiently powerful to be able to buy favours of the members of the

Parliament and ministers as high as the Attorney General. The parliamentary investigation found EIC guilty of bribery and insider trading and led to the impeachment of the Lord President of the Council and the imprisonment of the Company’s Governor. However, in the larger scheme, it did not mean much to the Company, as its assets were growing larger with every year.

As much as EIC was expanding and growing stronger on South India’s market, North India ruled by the powerful Mughals was yet out of grasp of the Company. However, Aurangazeb’s death in 1707 changed significantly the situation for EIC. Unlike Akbar, his great-grandfather, Aurangazeb put an end to the Hindu customs adopted by the Mughals, imposed taxes on all non-Muslims and above all expanded and held in checks for enormous costs and resources the empire strongholds deep into the Deccan. Aurangazeb fought cruel wars with Maratha’s hero of Hindu resistance, Shivaji Bhonsle, later consecrated in a Vedic ceremony as the Chhatrapati, The Lord of Umbrella, befitting a Hindu Emperor, and his successors, but his victories were short lived, as in many places of the empire rebellions were hitting hard at the stability and prosperity of the Mughals.

The decline of the central Mughal-rule gave way to rising to regional powers like Marathas, the everlasting most powerful enemies of Mughal Court, and other princely states in South India. Bengal, the only faithful and loyal province, which was held in checks by the Governor Murshid Quli Khan, a former Brahmin slave converted to Islam, well known for his abominable tax-collecting methods, remained the main providers of the Peacock Throne’s revenues. The frightful invasions of North India and plunder of Delhi in1739 by Nader Shah and the repeated invasions Ahmed Shah Durrani between 1748-1767 were used by the EIC to infiltrate even deeper on the economic market terribly shaken by the invaders. Striking alliances with local kings befitting their economic

advancement and providing them with mercenary troops and military new superior technology went also a long way in securing favourable trade contracts and access to administrative controls of large territories. Dalrymple reveals with great care the mechanisms, strategies and policies in place which made the East India Company the largest British business overseas. By 1750 EIC generated nearly £1 million sterling pounds out of Britain's total of £8 million import trade and from there, the number kept going higher and higher.

First, the EIC was not by all means just an ordinary trade share holder company. It used armed force and has organised over the years its own army to conquer new territories. The ongoing British-French military rivalry in Europe was also carried out in India between the Compagnie des Indes and East India Company. Both companies were actively meddling and taking sides and striking alliances in the local wars as befitting their purposes and interests, being offered in return of their military help large blocks or territory or land revenues. During the first Carnatic Wars (1740-1748) it occurred the first transformation of both companies from trading companies to

> "increasingly belligerent and militarised entities, part-textiles exporters, part-pepper traders, part-revenue-collecting land-holding business, and now, most profitably of all, state-of-the-art mercenary outfits." (p. 55)

There was an ongoing political polarisation of the military forces as Dupleix, the ambitious French commander of the army of the French Compagnie des Indes sided the Carnatic and Deccan warlords such were Scindia, Holkars, Tipu Sultan and Nana Phadanvis who have always employed French mercenaries and modern French military equipment, whereas the British supported the remnants of the Mughals, the emperor Muhammad Ali included, just to be able to gain even larger access to the political and economic mechanisms of power of the collapsing empire.

Financially they made alliances with the Indian bankers, the extremely wealthy Jagat Seths, bankers of the world earlier on, and then the Marwaris. Later, the EIC collaborated with Hindu bankers of Benares, Calcutta, Patna and Allahabad. Given the fact that the EIC was known for its reputation as an international capitalist corporation that valued the importance of paying its debts and always favouring the rich Indian traders and financiers, this made them more eligible for consistent loans than the leaders of the Maraths or the Sultan of Mysore. Ironically, Robert Clive used Jagat Seths' money to eliminate Siraj-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, in the famous Battle of Plassey, 1757. The economic and military force that EIC had in India by the end of the seventeenth century was clearly pointing to the takeover of the political power from the hands of the blind Mughal emperor Shah Alam.

The Company hired extremely ambitious and driven young men in key positions. The most prominent of all was, no doubt, Robert Clive. From an unruly and violent child and then a humble accountant working for the EIC, once in India he channelled his aloofness and hatred for equally French and Indians into military training and achieved a few military victories against the Carnatic warlords thanks to use of speed and surprise attacks. His ruthless ascension to power and rapidly acquired fortune in India that bought his way into House of Lords as well as his rapid downfall culminating with his suicide at the age of only forty-nine is skilfully narrated. An almost cinematic description, visually supported by rare paintings of the moment when the Mughal Emperor, Shah Alam, places the Diwani – the office of economic management of Mughal provinces – in the hands of Robert Clive immerses the reader deeply into a rich symbolism of power shifting and morphing into a different, strictly profit oriented shape where there is no hopes or future for the week. As Dalrymple points us, Diwani prerogatives gave the EIC not only a

> "veneer of Mughal legitimacy for the Company's conquests, it also potentially gave EIC the right to tax 20 million people and generate an estimated revenue of between £2 million and £3 million a year – a massive windfall by eighteenth standards." (p. 207)

There are even more examples where Dalrymple's refined artistry and very deep human approach are visible in the warp of his skilled writing. Notable are the chapters about the Bengal famine, Warren Hasting's impeachment and the deep, emotional meditation on the transiency of wealth and glory the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam who over many decades of his long reign outlived all his enemies – Nader Shah, Imad ud-Mulk, Robert Clive, Shuja ud-Daula, Ghulam Qadir.

The very fertile land of Bengal has been for century filling the treasury of the Mughal courts. It was by far the richest provinces of the empire and there is no wonder why so many wars between the French and the British India Company were fought over Bengal. However, 1768 brought only the lightest of rain and in 1769 no rain fell at all. By February 1770 the 70 percent of the usual rice crop had been lost, the hunger was prevalent. That was utterly and completely tragic for the rural population. In the worst affected districts one third of peasants starved to death in one of the greatest tragedies of the province history. Parents were selling their children; people were feeding on leaves and grass of the field and in June the Resident of the durbar affirmed the living were feeding off the dead. By July 1770, when the monsoon was still failing to nurture the soil, not only was the famine racking the country, but several diseases were also quickly spreading, and fires were sweeping great swathes of forest and land. There were ways which could have helped fighting the shortage of grains and food. But amid the greatly unconceivable human suffering caused by the severe famine, EIC not only was able to maintain the same level of their taxation, but in

some cases even increased revenue assessments by 10 per cent! Starving families were expected to pay their taxes, and while a fifth of Bengal was starving to death, EIC

> "authorized 44 per cent of their £22 million annual budget to be spent on the army and on the building of fortifications, so rapidly increasing the size of their sepoy regiments to 26,000 sepoys. The only rice they stockpiled was for the use of the sepoys of their own army; there was no question of cuts to the military budget, even as a fifth of Bengal was starving to death." (p. 220)

On top of their reckless race to increase their armed force, the merchants of the Company also monopolized the rice of the region buying all rice they could place their hands on at the onset of the terrible famine. The Nawab of Murshidabad and other wealthy aristocrats were distributing rice to the poor and setting up gruel kitchens trying to alleviate the pain of so many so greatly afflicted. In here, Dalrymple is stressing and outlining another salient feature of the rapacious Company's merchants and officers who had no understanding or attachment to the country but looked upon it as a means for acquiring great profit and wealth in a record time. No wonder, *loot* (plunder) was the first Hindustani word that entered the English lexicon spoken at that time.

A very important consequence of how appalling the EIC handled the Bengal famine as well as an increased need to control the company's gigantic trade brought the EIC under the Parliament's scrutiny. The Prime Minister, Lord North was determined to bring to heel the Company, but the chartered privileges guaranteed by the Crown were strongly supporting the EIC status quo. Also, many MPs had shares and owed EIC stock, many positions in Parliament where secured thanks to the immense fortunes made over the years. When the Company was brought on the verge of collapsing due to heavily spending on increasing

its sepoy army and ammunition, the Parliament simply could not let it sink but agreed to an unprecedented and unconceivable until then mega loan of £1.4 million to EIC to stave off its bankruptcy in exchange for having the EIC agreeing to be subject itself to a Regulating Act, defined by Lord North's India Bill Act of June 1773. It was the first mega-bailout in the history, and it has created the precedent of having the government stepping in up to a certain extend a right to regulate and control a private business. Further down the line Pitt's India Act of 1784 helped in regulating the trade of the Company within even clearer boundaries. However, Dalrymple is of the opinion that even so, the EIC still remained in many ways

> "semi-autonomous imperial power in its own right, albeit now one partially incorporated within the Hanoverian state machinery." (p. 233)

A Governor General to oversee not only the Bengal Presidency but those of Madras and Bombay too was also appointed by the Parliament. The first Governor General was Warren Hastings, one of the EIC veterans,

> "one of the most intelligent and experienced of all Company officials, plain-living, scholarly, diligent and austerely workaholic." (p. 233)

His work ethos helped extensively paving the way for the British Raj administration in the years to come. In the span of only a few years he

> "unified the currency systems, ordered the codification of the Hindu laws and digests of Muslim law books, reformed the tax and customs system, fixed land revenue and stopped the worst oppression being carried out of behalf of private traders by the local agents. He created an efficient postal service, backed a proper cartographical survey of India by James Rennell and built a series of public granaries, including the great Gola at Patna, to make sure the famine of 1770-71 was never repeated." (p. 238)

Unfortunately his exemplary conduct far from securing his laurels, brought him instead the hatred of Philip Francis, one of the government's appointed councillors to oversee Hastings's work in his office as Governor General. Philip Francis was a brilliant young man, ruthlessly ambitious but also of a highly vindictive nature who not only thought he was meant to be in Hastings' position but having never forgotten that Hastings was about to kill him in duel, swore on his life to get revenge and bring Hastings down. Once back in Britain, Philip Francis managed to gain over his side Edmund Burke, the Anglo-Irish Whig rising stateman and political theorist and both had Hastings found guilty in front of the Court for twenty-two serious offenses.

Ironically Edmund Burke, – who previously was "a great admirer of Hastings" talents –, has remarkably grasped and laid openly in front of the court and large audience every crime and atrocity committed by the corrupted officers of the Company. Hastings was blamed for all the wrongdoings of the Company when he was the least of all to be accused of any of it. On the contrary, Hastings was probably one of the most austere, modest and uncorruptible employee of the EIC. He was not exactly an innocent, but certainly not a rapacious fortune maker at the expense of the poor of poorer. The seven-year trial of Hastings impeachment for abominable crimes that he has never committed is in the eyes of Dalrymple a very good example of how ignorant the British people were with regards to reality of India. Warren Hastings was eventually cleared of all charges, but the last years of his life were negatively affected by persecution and depression. The man appointed to succeed Hastings as the Governor General was General Lord Charles Cornwallis, the same that had surrendered the thirteen American Colonies of the British Empire over to George Washinton in 1781. The logic behind all this was that it was expected of him to make sure that "the same never happened in India." (p. 314)

Emperor Shah Alam's ordeals to reestablish his rightful imperial reign of the unravelling Mughal Empire were either helped or hindered to suit the Company's expansionist plans over India. Much of his tribulations are shown in detail in "Desolation of Delhi" chapter. The title serves well to depict the state of the emperor and his royal court over long, unhappy years. The Mughals chronicles written by Ghulam Hussain Khan records and Anand Ram Mukhlis as well as moving accounts of the great poet Mir lament the ruined palaces Delhi the capital of the Mughal Empire where the Shah is returning after twelve-year exile in Allahabad and the streets of the city "lost in rubble."

Memoirs of the Swiss adventurer Antoine Polier,[1] and the notes of Comte of Modave are equally important to recreate the image of the devastated capital city. Polier was a skilled military engineer who had helped the Company to rebuild Fort William in Calcutta after it was destroyed by the army of Siraj-ud-Daula, but then offered his services to the Najaf Khan, the efficient son-in-law of the emperor who took upon him the reconstruction of Delhi and the restoration of the empire in its old boundaries.

In recreating the figure of the emperor, Dalrymple uses less explored sources as the unused biography *Shah Alam Nama* by Munshi Munna Lal. Shah Alam's long reign has been a permanent adjustment of imperial power under the protection and guardianship of either of the Maratha Scindia chiefs or the East India Company making him "only a chessboard king" as the poet Azad aptly describes him. Although blinded by his own protégé Ghulām Qādir in his late forties, the emperor continued to remain – till his death at the age of 78 in 1806 – a compelling presence reminding

[1] Polier was a skilled military engineer who had helped the Company to rebuild Fort William in Calcutta after it was destroyed by the army of Siraj-ud-Daula but then offered his services to the Najaf Khan, the efficient son-in-law of the emperor who took upon him the reconstruction of Delhi and the restoration of the empire in its old boundaries.

of the greatness and refinement of the Mughal Court. He was also an accomplished writer who wrote poems and songs collected in anthology known as *Nadirat-i-Shahi, Diwan-e-Aftab.*

Despite repeated warnings and obvious attempts to limit and control the imperialistic Company, the newly appointed Governor General, Lord Wellesley was determined to fight more wars for subduing more territory under Company's administration.

With the help of considerable loans[2] from the local bankers, mostly the Gopaldas Manohardas of Benares, he has got the means to enlarge the Company's army from 115,000 men to 155,000 men in just a few years. At the same time the Maratha warlords such was Scindia, and before him Tipu Sultan, were finding more and more difficult to find the money to finance their wars. Over the next decade the Company's army grew even more to 195,000 men which made it

> "one of the largest outstanding European-style armies in the world, and around twice of the size of the British army." (p. 365)

The worrying state of debt accumulated by EIC along with Wellesley's propensities to unthinkable luxurious life-style made the directors to put a stop to this and called Wellesley back. In 1813, the Parliament abolished the Company's trade monopoly with the East. This move made possible for other merchants and agents to enter Bombay and Calcutta markets. Over the years there were strong voices calling on the excessiveness of having so much of political administrative power over such a great territory as India in hands of a joint stock company.[3]

---

[2] The Company's debts were £17 million when Wellesley first arrived to India. By 1803 it was rising to £31.5 million.

[3] The famous saying of Edmund Burke, the same one who impeached Warren Hastings goes "A state in the guise of a merchant."

In 1833, the Parliament finally passed the East India Company Charter Bill which removed the EIC right to trade and so it turned it into a sort of governing corporation. It was then that the Company was made answerable and subject to government supervision, eventually culminating in outright nationalisation in 1858. A crucial event that triggered this final step in bringing down the Company was the bloodshed events when Company's own sepoy army rose in revolt against its employer.

Known under various names as *Sepoy Mutiny*, *Great Rebellion*, and even the *First War of Independence*, the revolt against the abusive rule of East India Company which functioned as a sovereign power on behalf of the British Crown did not change the ruler but make even more clear that India was now directly under the rule of the British Government.

As much as greed, determination, military power and great long-term organisational plans helped the Company to grab control and rule over India on the backdrop of the collapsing Mughal Empire, its success could only be possible thanks to the support given by the British Parliament. Over the long two and a half centuries, a great number of the members of the Parliament were shareholders in the profitable business of the Companies, many were bought, and many were able to secure seats – the Rotten Boroughs – by paying immense fortunes, Clive included. The relationship between the Company and the Government was, as Dalrymple describes it "a symbiotic" one and it was becoming more apparent throughout the eighteenth century as a "public-private partnership."

Historia magistra vitae. The East India Company's relentless rise and fall is more actual than we think. Today we see multinational corporations and businesses attempting and succeeding at imposing on governments of many states across the world their own terms and conditions in securing immensily profitable contracts or trade monopoly

using increasingly refined forms of the long-established ways EIC employed for centuries on end. The much ongoing talk about the macroeconomics and global markets underlines necessarily a global power which may or may not be able to maintain the rule. It may also lead to revolt and anarchy.

About the Author:

Florina Dobre-Brat has a master's degree in Sanskrit from the University of Pune, India. In 2007 she has been awarded a Ph.D. in Philosophy by the Institute of Philosophy of the Romanian Academy for a thesis on the fifth century CE grammarian-philosopher Bhartṛhari's contribution to philosophy of language in India. Alongside working for over twenty years with the Central Library of the University of Bucharest and I.C. Petrescu National Pedagogical Library, between 2011-2018 she taught courses in Sanskrit, Classical Indian culture and civilization, and Indian Classical Literature at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Modern Languages and Classics. Some of the published papers covering her areas of expertise are available at https://unibuc.academia.edu/InaBrat. She lives now in Scotland with her family.

Contact: inabrat79@gmail.com

Sumana Roy, *How I Became a Tree*, New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2017, 233 p., ISBN: 978-93-82277-44-6 (e-book).

Ioana Clara ENESCU
Faculty of Letters,
Transilvania University of Brașov

In February 1999, *The American Biology Teacher* magazine published an editorial written by botanists James Wandersee and Elizabeth Schussler, in which they drew attention to the fact that in the American school system, students in primary and secondary grades are twice as interested in the study of animals as that of plants. Starting from the study conducted in schools, the two noticed that the phenomenon they called *plant blindness* is much more widespread, affecting even biology teachers, who do not give due importance in their courses to these aquatic and terrestrial life forms. Beyond zoocentrism or even zoochauvinism, attitudes considered by the two scientists responsible for the underrepresentation of plants, this particular type of blindness represents a complex cultural phenomenon that explains humans' inability to perceive the vegetal world as more than a mere inanimate background. In the recent years, as the Environmental Humanities diversified its multidisciplinary approach, Critical Plant Studies emerged as a subfield in which botany and the humanities join their discourses, in order to raise awareness about the complexity and the beauty of the plant world.

Indian writer and poet, Sumana Roy is one the authors who lends her voice to the plants, sharing her passion for trees with those who see the world as a fascinating arboreal figure. Published in 2017 in New Delhi by Aleph Book Company, reprinted in 2021 by Yale University Press, her book *How I Became a Tree*, a work of non-fiction, is an exquisite example of what it means to engage with the world in an arboreal logic,

perceiving trees as sentient and dynamic entities. Roy's approach resonates with Opperman's concept of the world (2023), envisioned as

> "a storied planet where all earthly entities (including the inorganic ones) produce meaning filled encounters with everything else in ongoing processes of communication." (p. 13)

For Roy, the interaction with the trees has existential meaning, revealing to the author the shortcomings of being human. The only possible solution to overcome the existential crisis is, for the Indian author, transforming herself into a tree. Hence, her book is an exploration of the different meanings of becoming another being, one that has for so long been neglected by the human eye.

Structured in nine parts of different lengths, with ideas naturally flowing from one into the other, in a subjective order, incorporating the author's emotions, some of her childhood recollections, literary encounters, reading preferences, meaningful interactions with humans and more-than-humans, the book is a nuanced testimony of a metamorphosis that occurs gradually, involving the author's being in its deepest layers. The book starts abruptly, highlighting the reason for wanting to change her identity: "At first it was the underwear. I wanted to become a tree because trees did not wear bras" (Roy, 2017, p. 9). The inferior status of the woman in society and her having to comply with rules that she feels are absurd become the first elements that trigger the need for change. Coping with violence in the human world, living in an accelerated rhythm, in which deadlines and ageism influence every human interaction, the greed for abundance and the different identity tags that people have to wear add to the portrait made in dark lines of humanity. Living in such a world seems unbearable for a woman who feels "a tree gradually [growing] inside her head", as stated in the title of the first chapter.

Living according to *tree time* is a major shift that promises to change the human into a tree-like being. Interestingly enough, the meaning of this concept is revealed to the author, as she confesses,

> "one night, in my salty sleep: carpe diem, seize the moment, living in the present – that was tree time, a life without worries for the future or regret for the past. There's sunlight: gulp, swallow, eat, there's night: rest." (12)

Changing the pace in which one lives means, according to an arboreal point of view, to focus on what it is, rather that what it was or will be, and accepting the fact that one is connected to the web of life through an element that cannot be changed by one's will, and that is light. Unlike trees, humans have lost their connection to natural time, and this is one of the main causes of their suffering. Such an important revelation becomes possible only in sleep, in a state that puts consciousness on hold, allowing the mind to access its deepest strata. In order to produce a significant change, understanding the concept is not enough, that is why Roy gives it a real, vivid, vegetal form, as she marks important moments of her and her loved ones' lives by connecting them to the action of planting a tree and comparing the way humans change in time to the way the trees change:

> "When my nephew was born five years ago, for instance, I planted a neem tree in our backyard. The little boy stands at three feet or so. The neem tree is taller than my husband who is six feet tall." (p. 11)

The comparison between the child's height, her husband's height and that of the tree paradoxically does not separate the three beings, but it shows them as equally facing an objective reality, to which each of them responds differently.

If growing is a response of the living beings in relation to time, movement, or the lack of it, is the expression of the way in which they

interact with space. The immobility of the trees, partially responsible for the lack of attention given to them by humans, is their ontological feature, while for people it is a sickness that makes them vulnerable and sentences them to exile inside their own homes. Being unable to move is not only a medical condition, but it can also be a chance to gain a different perspective of the world. In addition, if one cannot go out to see the trees, as immobile as they are, they find a way to communicate and to cross space:

> "From my bed, where weakness and exhaustion had chained me, I gradually got used to a different perspective of my world, and certainly my life. […] Coconut, betel nut […] palm leaves sneaked into my room as shadows. I watched and gauged the fierceness of the wind from their sway and swing on the white ceiling." (p. 21)

The presence or the absence of articulate language is another thing that traditionally separates people and trees. But in Roy's view of the world, there is no place for "common place", hence the silence of the trees is a cliché easily to be dismantled when observing the sounds that trees make when they respond to wind. In this context, becoming a tree means escaping the noisy human world and turning to the music of the leaves. That the trees could be considered musical instruments is not a new idea, but Roy changes the point of reference and looks for the sound of the trees in the human voice:

> "I have begun categorizing the voices of people on their tonal proximity to the sound of leaves in the wind. My father's baritone, for instance, is of the sal leaves, my mother's is of the jamun leaves, my little nephew's affectionate mewling the voice of ankle-length grass. My husband, after he'd chuckled at my weird nomenclature, said that he'd found the plant life equivalent of my voice too: I have the voice of 'dhaaner khetey dheu', the wind waves on paddy fields." (p. 34)

As far as sounds are concerned, changing into a tree is surprisingly simple, as trees share

> "a natural sound with people. It is the sound of resistance – like protesters' 'raising their voice', trees produced a sound that held in it the fight against wind, water, rain, to tearing, cutting, and breaking." (pp. 34-35)

The human gaze that is used to look for social and political details finds them in the vegetal world, too, as people and trees alike form communities, interact, struggle to survive.

Another important aspect in the metamorphosis that Roy is concerned about is what happens when trees, just like humans, become a source of inspiration in art – drawing, photography, creative writing, and sculpture. As in the previous contexts, the author discovers that trees are subject to marginalization, if not entirely, as is the case in sculpture, at least partially, as in drawing, painting or photography, where what is not visible, like the roots of a tree, is not interesting enough for the artists. What cannot be seen in the real world cannot be turned into a piece of art, people imposing their way of perceiving the world upon all the other beings. Roy deconstructs and reconstructs these ordering principles, recovering the image of the trees and turning them into the most important filter for seeing the world.

In this new arboreal order of the living, the material dimension of the plant realm is not its only one relevant, thus Roy is interested in deciphering the meaning and the function of their shadows, too. One of the most beautiful episodes of the book is a childhood recollection, in which young Sumana was in a mango orchard, at a competition intended for children, in which they had to collect in baskets as many fruits as possible from the earth. The girl, older than her fellow players, having a profoundly poetic soul, is the only one to reach the end with an empty basket, because she collected the shadow of the fruits, and they all

disappeared in the light. The shadow is, in this context, is a beautiful metaphor that speaks about Roy's preference for what is hidden, what does not make it for the first page, what changes and cannot be grasped.

Life and death, sexuality and religion are other major themes of reflection in Roy's book, each contributing to the creation of a tree-shaped universe, at least as complex as the human one. Furniture as the after life of a tree, the polygamy of trees, their incapacity to laugh and make others laugh, the fact that they provide a space for illumination or function as substitutes for Buddha himself are just a few of the ideas that dance in Roy's book, as the light through the leaves of a tree.

Becoming a tree is an existential journey that Roy shares with fellow writers, scientists, philosophers or mythical characters, and this multiplies her explorations virtually infinitely. The book is crossed by two questions whose answers accumulate and construct a nuanced image of what it means to go through an ontological change:

> "So why was I so keen on becoming a tree? And was my malady exclusive to me alone?" (p. 16)

The inner need to change is explained with reasons varying from health issues to temperament, from discontent with human society, to cultural patterns. The answer for the second question takes the form of finding kindred spirits, people that cannot help but finding trees everywhere. Of all the references given by Roy, that cross space and time, from Ancient Greece to contemporary India, three figures stand out as prototypes of human-to-tree transformation: Nandalal Bose, Rabindranath Tagore and Jagadish Chandra Bose. The painter, the writer and the botanist are summoned in the book as three sacred figures that give depth to the author's own perception of the plant world. In looking out for people that share the same interest, Roy confesses that she behaves like a lover:

> "I was eager for some kind of kinship – lovers are, after all, relatives in a shared universe. And there is such happiness – even relief –, in loving a loved one for the same reasons." (p. 44)

Writing about the way they see the plant world, Roy sketches a cultural history of India starting with the late ninetieth century. Together with the world-famous figure of Tagore, she brings into light not only a painter that is regarded as one who modernized Indian painting, but a scientist whose discovery, if accepted by the Western (dominant at the time) world, could have changed earlier the way we perceive the plants and the roles they play in the living world. Trees drawn in the same manner as people, real and imaginary gardens that become places to learn, to love or to die, in poems, short stories or in a real university, plants being treated as children by a childless botanist, all of these are fragments of an enchanted world that once existed and it is brought back to life by an author who is fascinated to discover parts of her own soul in people whom she has never met, but feels so closely connected to.

Writing about nature is, for Sumana Roy and for all her spiritual family of tree-loving people, a way of being, and it comes from deeply within, not as a response to external crises, and it has nothing ideological in it. It is an inner urge, fed by intense feelings of love, like the ones a parent has for a child. Seeing plants as offsprings is a leitmotif that runs through Sumana Roy's book, deepening the confessional character of her writing, touching the very sensitive topic of childless (or childfree) people who turn their affection to infants belonging to other species. In Jagadish Chandra Bose's works, Roy finds a kindred soul, a parent that is looking at his child trying eagerly to understand everything he goes through. But more than that, this kind of connection with the vegetal world gives Roy the certainty of the fact that there is no ontological barrier between humans and plants:

> “One can only estimate my joy in becoming aware of these comparisons, not just his thinking of plants as human children, but also the easy fluidity with which he saw the workings of two seemingly very different species. […] To read Bose, to live like him, is to become aware of a liberating sense of life where one can be plant and human at the same time.” (p. 134)

In creating the amazingly beautiful Santiniketan Garden, Rabindranath Tagore’s father, the poet himself, and finally, his son, “turned barren land into an oasis filled with the best kind of tropical fruit bearing trees.” (p. 91) Similarly, Sumana Roy turns the almost barren land of Critical Plant Studies in India into a wonderful garden, in which every tree has a story, every flower is in itself a poem, in which the roots are visible, and X-Ray analysis are regularly performed to plants to discover as much as possible about their inner words.

There is a word in Japanese, untranslatable into any other language that describes the way light is filtered through the leaves of a tree, *komorebi*. Its meaning refers to light flowing gracefully, creating ever-changing patterns of shadows on the ground. A single word manages to unite sky and earth, light and darkness, suggesting their harmony, inviting people to enjoy beauty and reflect upon the way it is created. As far as her critical discourse is concerned, Sumana Roy’s writing has all the features of the Japanese concept: it is gentle, poetic, flowing through all kinds of leaves, uniting and harmonizing science, art, philosophy, history, fiction and reality, the objective world and her subjective perception. The visible and the invisible, time and space, cultures and languages are naturally blended by the author in a text that resembles a tree with a bird on one of its branches, and light pouring through its leaves.

References:

Oppermann, S. (2023). *Ecologies of a Storried Planet in the Anthropocene*. West Virginia University Press.

Wandersee, J. H., Schussler, E.E. (1999). Preventing Plant Blindness. *The American Biology Teacher*, vol. 61, no. 2, pp. 82-86. https://doi.org/10.2307/4450624.

About the Author:

Ioana Clara Enescu is teaching assistant within the Faculty of Letters, Transilvania University of Brașov, Romania, and foreign lecturer within Xi'an International Studies University, China. She has completed her PhD (in March 2024) in contemporary Chinese literature, studying it from an ecocritical point of view. She has a strong interest in Environmental Humanities, mainly in Plant Studies, Animal Studies, econaratology, and material ecocriticism.

Contact: ioana.enescu@unitbv.ro, ioanaclaraenescu@yahoo.com

Aanchal Malhotra, *The Book of Everlasting Things*, Gurugram: HarperCollins, 2017, 480 p., ISBN: 9789356999152.

Cătălina-Ioana PAVEL
***Center for Modern Indian Studies* (CeMIS),**
Georg-August Universität Göttingen, Germany

The Book of Everlasting Things written by Aanchal Malhotra is a chronicle of fragrance, loss, longing, and the ability of memory to endure and preserve the past through an invisible realm: smell. It is a treasury of intangible, everlasting things that are stronger than material, physical borders, more powerful than a place, a country, or even physical death.

The book tells the story of Samir Vij and his pursuit of fragrance, through the history of pre- and post-Partition Lahore. Amidst the beginning of the rupture between Hindu and Muslim communities in Hindustan, the book conveys the powerful message of how *ittar* – liquid and flowing – is borderless and makes no difference between religious communities. The novel is divided into five parts, following the love story of Samir Vij, a Hindu boy from Anarkali Bazaar in Lahore, an apprentice of perfume, and Firdaus Khan, a Muslim girl, an illuminator of manuscripts from Wazir Khan Mosque.

Smell, "the emperor of all senses", becomes a character in itself in Malhotra's writing. Borderless realms like perfume prove to be stronger than material ones in her writing, continuously evolving and transforming, disregarding the human-made borders, like religion, for example: "[…] fragrances no longer remain static liquids, but rather become living, breathing, growing, evolving forms." Or, in another passage:

> “An equalizer like no other, for attar, liquid and flowing, was borderless. It saw no Muslim or Hindu, no Sikh or Christian. It seeped and dissolved and spilled like water, slipping deftly through the crevices of all differences.” (p. 157)

In another part of the story, when smell is the only way of recreating the feeling of home, of belonging, the limitless side of it is what renders it essential, perhaps more than a language:

> “In lands far away, where earth and body converge harmoniously, it is regarded as no less important than language one speaks- essential, intimate, and often even elevated. Smell is voluptuous, it has volume, it blooms. And since it is invisible, a product of desire and imagination, it is also limitless.” (p. 286)

The connection between scent, emotion and memory, is highlighted throughout the storyline and it is the red thread connecting the history of Partition, the daily lives of all the characters in Malhotra’s novel, and the internal or external wars they go through:

> “Our sense of smell is one of the most extraordinary ways to preserve intimacy, history, and, of course, memory.” (p. 137)

Similarly, in another instance, the intimate connection between smell and emotion appears very often in the perfumery lessons taught to Samir by his uncle:

> “There is an intimate connection between smell and emotion, for they are processed in the same part of the brain. [...] the sudden presence of a smell is capable of transporting us back to the moment when we first smelled it. Tuberose had always been known to you, whether you knew it or not. Always trust your nose, Samir. Allow it to lead you, give you strength and happiness. Wield it to summon everything you love” (p. 138)

In *The Book of Everlasting Things*, fragrance plays a multiple role: it is a vehicle, transporting one to different realms, physical or imaginary, it provides solace amidst internal battles or exterior wars, it acts as a refuge:

> "[...] Sitting in Lahore, Vivek travelled the length of Hindustan, and ultimately the world, through smell. [...] he walked through saffron fields in Pampore and picked bright white jasmine in Madurai, gathered ambergris on the shores of oceans faraway, and smelled the musk deer in Leh. He listened to sacred histories of rose and sandalwood, and learned about the fragrance of the earth." (p. 14)

As the novel progresses, perfume acts as a cathartic instrument to preserve memories, even the most painful ones:

> "Samir puttar, always remember that the most poignant compositions will emerge from the things that do not leave us. Like the memories of love and happiness, or periods of deep longing, or moments of unfathomable loss." (p. 86)

In the end, fragrance acts as the medium of keeping tradition alive, since it is perfume that made Vivek cope with grief and regain his identity after the war, and it is this craft that makes Samir, as well, follow in his footsteps to trace his lineage and lost family members:

> "But what pleased him the most was how, like his calligraphy hujra, this attar kada was a place where tradition had been safeguarded and disseminated, and great care had been taken to carry an ancient art into a modern world." (p. 94)

On the other side, perfume changes from being a solace to being a painful memory, "a language into a past he was not ready to relive or revive" (p. 192).

In Malhotra's writing, perfume is irresistible and sudden, and despite being an art that can be learned or polished, one becomes a veritable "soldier of scent" by inheritance:

> "My uncle says that it is something you're born with, the gift of your nose. But my mother claims it's because I am a monsoon child and the smells of the world have settled into me, now inseparable. Monsoon enlivens the world, and that is what fragrance does as well." (p. 92)

The Book of Everlasting Things provides an extended analysis on the psychology of smell, starting with how it affects our lives ever since we are born and ending with how it determines our choices and paths:

> "Right from the moment that we are in our mother's womb, our life is defined by smell. The smells that string my life together are evocative of my mother: sandal, tulsi, neem. For Veer ji, it is ambrette. But for you, it could have only been tuberose [...]" (p. 137)

Perfume is powerful, it can restore the beauty of the world and bring back familiar sights and feelings, it evokes childhood memories and restores bonds with the past, with the familiar:

> "Customers come to buy a sensation, a feeling, a transportation, a movement of time, a medium. They come to buy history, memory, dreams, desires, and romance." (p. 82)

Fragrance makes Som Nath revive an old Lahore of his childhood, sandalwood makes him remember his wife Leela, rose water and tuberose make Samir remember his lost love, tulsi evokes memories of his mother's medicinal concoctions and his ancestral house, *mushk danna*, or ambrette, renders a nostalgic Vivek helpless to the grief brought by its memories.

Perfumers are storytellers, their worlds revolving around creating a treasury of smell and devoting their lives to that one masterpiece that

encompasses those feelings or memories that cannot be surpassed otherwise:

> "As perfumers, we use smell to construct stories. A perfume, then, is more than just a form of opulence or luxury. It has the ability to seduce and allure, to repel and repulse, to persuade and command, to warn and defend. It can evoke long-forgotten memories and enliven those who are no longer alive." (p. 58)

Vivek dedicates his most precious creation to the memory of his lost wife, just like Samir's life purpose is accomplished once he creates *Khazin-e-Firdaus*, the "Keeper of Paradise", the perfume that encompasses his life-lasting love for Firdaus, the daughter of the master calligrapher from the other side of the bazar.

Malhotra's characters are dwellers into the past, recorders of memories and nostalgias:

> "This smell, this smell has made me feel seven years old again. Fragrance had the power to deliver one back in time." (p. 64)

They return to the past to find solace, happiness, to surpass pain, to recollect friendships or simply to find an answer to present conflicts. Their memories are recreated through scent and it is exactly this invisible, fragile and elusive world that they need to preserve in order to keep them alive. Just like perfumes are the keepers of their crumbling inner worlds, the characters of Malhotra's novel are the keepers of this fragile and unique art. Scent is an essential part of their existence.

Fragrance is a distraction from war and Partition, but it is also a reminder of it. Lahore and its diverse culture and communal harmony are described and remembered through the smell of *khus* curtains of its havelis, childhood through spice smells and traditional Lahori dishes, etc. Despite scent being a tool for unity among different religious

communities, it is noticeable how even plants or flowers have their own division: for example, *tulsi*, the holy basil, is associated with Hinduism, while the rose water is sprinkled on the stairs of Wazir Khan Mosque, thus being associated with Islam.

The Book of Everlasting Things is a spellbinding reflection about the power of smell and the art of perfume. It is also a reflection about one of the most painful episodes in the history of the Indian subcontinent, the Partition. Through the shared love history of Samir, "the child, the Lahori, the nostalgist" and Firdaus – "Firdaus with the soot, with the beauty mark. Firdaus with the pistachio eyes. Firdaus with the unusual traces of vanilla" – an old lost world of Lahore is recreated:

> "He wove together his lived years, the histories of his ancestors, the story of his departure and his yearning. He attempted to build a fragrance around the flower. [...] A flower serving as a bridge became the inspiration for a perfume called Lahore" (p. 290).

About the Author:

After having completed a B.A. in Anthropology and Comparative literature with a thesis on Shiva and Kali, **Cătălina-Ioana Pavel** went on to study Arabic and Hindi at the University of Bucharest. She is now enrolled as a M.A. student at CeMIS (Centre for Modern Indian Studies), Göttingen University, Germany. She is mostly interested in the history of Malabar region, spice routes and anything related to the Islamic history in India.

Cătălina-Ioana Pavel is the author of the volume: *Acolo unde se naște musonul. Un an în regatul zeului Parasurama*, Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2023, ISBN: 978-606-17-2176-4.

Contact: catalinaioanapavel@gmail.com

Jael Silliman, *Shalome Rides a Royal Elephant. The Story of the First Jews of Calcutta*, New Delhi: Talking Cub by Speaking Tiger Books, 2023, 60 p., ISBN: 978-93-5447-734-8.

Mihaela GLIGOR
Cluj Center for Indian Studies
Babeș Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca

Aparently a story for children, *Shalome Rides a Royal Elephant* – written and illustrated by Jael Silliman, an author, scholar, and women's rights activist, a tenured Associate Professor at the University of Iowa who has written extensively about the Baghdadi Jewish community to which she belongs – tells the story of the first Jews of Calcutta.

The story begins in 1792, on the shores of the Arabian Sea, in the port city of Surat, where a little monkey – "Chanchal, an amazing, brilliant monkey" – used to carefully watch the

> "ships dock in the busy port to see what kind of people visited my town. […] That day I saw a tall man aboard this big ship. He stood out from all the others. He was wearing a maroon and gold turban that was elegantly tied. His robes were long and flowing. Many servants followed him. I knew he must be an important person, and certainly very rich. I heard people call him Shalome." (p. 3)

The little monkey does some tricks and is immediately noticed by the rich man.

> "'My name is Shalome Aaron Obadiah ha Cohen,' he told me. From that moment on, just as I had planned, we became friends. I was sure that our *monkership* would last till the very end." (p. 8)

It was the beginning of a wonderful friendship, as we can read in the pages of this beautiful book.

Shalome came to India from “an ancient city called Aleppo in Syria.” Soon after arriving in India, he married Najima, and baby Lunah was born. The business was good, as “Shalome’s shipments came from China, Siam, Zanzibar and Arabia, as well as from across India.” (p. 12) But one day, “Shalome decided to leave Surat to set up his business in Calcutta, the capital city.” (p. 12)

On the way to Calcutta, “Shalome would sit down to write his diary. He wuld write about the places he visited. […] Shalome wrote in Arabic using the Hebrew script.” (p. 15)

They arrived in Calcutta in 1798.

> “We travelled down the main throughfare called Chowringhee, Esplanade and visited Government House, Tank Square and Fort William. […] Calcutta was such an important place. People from across India and the world came to Calcutta to trade and become rich. They spoke many languages: Portuguese, Chinese, Armenian, Dutch, English, Greek, Arabic, Persian, and of course, many languages from all over India. All these people lived peacefully together, learning from one another.” (pp. 17-19)

“Shalome was the first Jew to set up his home and business in Calcutta.” (p. 21) He soon “opened a prayer hall in his home because he was a very religious man.” (p. 22)

Shalome used to write about his daily life and the Calcutta of those times in his diary. Some 240 years later, his descendant Jael Silliman weaves a great-fun story based on this diary, where Shalome’s adventures are narrated by his little monkey friend, Chanchal.

Shalome Rides a Royal Elephant is not just a story for children, but also a wonderful book about the great melting pot that is Calcutta, in particular, where different people, communities and religions have lived

in harmony over the ages. The beautiful illustrations are an excellent plus, especially when it comes to the young readers.

It is very difficult to write a book for children. Their level of understanding is different and their attention must be stimulated, somehow. Chanchal, the little monkey, does the magic here, as the children are captivated by its courage and attitude. Following Chanchal's adventures, the youngsters learn many things about history of Calcutta and about the Jewish community in particular.

> "When I asked about the food, Shalome told me he could not eat anything as the food was not *kosher*. […] Jewish people have strict rules about how food is to be prepared and what can and cannot be eaten." (p. 33)

By small examples like this one – essential for understanding the Jewish community – children can learn about the people and their customns, and also about the religious values of other religions, which is an important thing in the multicultural and plurireligious Calcutta of our days. But the book also contains important advices for the children, much appreciated in the diversity of the city: "he often told me that it is the good deeds you do, and the money you give to those in need, which are most important." (p. 49)

Such lessons are taught in Calcutta's schools even today. The children learn that

> "Other Jewish traders from across the Middle East followed Shalome and are building synagogues, schools and hospitals, and setting up important businesses in Calcutta. The city is also growing bigger and more roads and imposing buildings are being built. People call it 'the city of palaces'." (p. 57)

Shalome Rides a Royal Elephant is a beautiful true story of people who worked hard to transform the city of Calcutta in what it is today, a vibrant city where everyone is welcomed.

Jael Silliman continues the work of her great, great, great, great, great grandfather, Shalome Obadiah ha Cohen, the first Jewish settler in Calcutta. She is preserving the Jewish heritage of Calcutta and is documenting and writes about the importance of preserving the memory of ancestors, regardless of their religion. She is invited in literature festivals and in schools, to speak to young students about the importance of living together in harmony. She has also created a digital archive on the Calcutta Jewish community and her tremendous efforts are visible: https://indianjewishcenter.co.il/baghdadi-jews/

Her work of preserving the Jewish Calcutta is impressive and this little book, *Shalome Rides a Royal Elephant*, deserves to be read by everybody, as it is a masterpiece about love, kindness and the joy of living for others.

About the Author:

Mihaela Gligor is Scientific Researcher in the Philosophy of Culture at The Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca, "George Barițiu" Institute of History, Department of Humanities, and also the founder and the Director of *Cluj Center for Indian Studies* from Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca.

Contact: mihaela.gligor@ubbcluj.ro.

Radhika Iyengar, *Fire on the Ganges: Life among the Dead in Banaras*, Gurugram: HarperCollins, 2023, 346 p., ISBN: 978-93-5699-467-6.

Mihaela GLIGOR
Cluj Center for Indian Studies
Babeș Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca

For many travelers to India, Varanasi (or Banaras) is a must visit city. During times, writers, poets, anthropologists and artists have been impressed by the city and many books were written about the *ghats* and the rituals that place the city among "the holiest cities of India. It is also where Lord Shiva is believed to reside." (p. 13)

Fire on the Ganges, by Radhika Iyengar, an Indian journalist, writer, and recipient of the 2018 Red Ink Awards in the category of human rights, is a masterpiece that describes, in an unprecedent manner, "the life among the dead in Banaras." The book is based on almost eight years of research on the Dom community of Varanasi, a group of people that have a remarkable importance for the Hindus. The Doms are the people that perform the last rituals, and take care of the ceaselessly burning pyre at the Manikarnika Ghat.

> "Doms are keepers of a sacred flame – supposedly burning for centuries – over which they have sole ownership. Lighting each funeral pyre with the Doms's fire is considered not only auspicious, but also crucial. Without it, it is alleged, a devout Hindu will not receive moksha, liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth." (p. 138)

But among the ghats, Manikarnika has a special place, as it is believed that in that particular place Lord Shiva whispers his sacred mantra into the ears of the dead before escorting the souls into heaven.

> "'Death, in most places, is feared,' a local once remarked as I sat upon the steps of Manikarnika Ghat with my notebook. 'Here it is celebrated.'
> And it is here that moksha or mukti – the liberation of one's soul from the endless cycle of death and rebirth – can truly be attained." (p. 14)

Radhika Iyengar's story begins here, on the banks of Ganga, in the city of dead, searching for the living ones. *Fire on the Ganges* portrays the community entrusted by Hindus to perform the last rites. The Doms are the keepers of the sacred flame, and their importance is extraordinary for believers. But they are also untouchables, and their life is often crueller than death itself. In each and every one of them there is a remarkable contradiction between what is holly and what is impure for those that seek their help. Poor and socially neglected, "the Doms carry with them an enduring sense of inferiority," they often face "persisting acts of oppression by 'upper caste' Hindus" (pp. 19-20); they live at the edge of the Hindu society, but that society needs them for the most important ritual of all. How people look at them is extremely important and their future depends of the perceptions from outside their small and closed community.

> "The first time I visited a Dom home, the elders placed their palms together in a gesture of salutation and tucked their shoulders inwarnd to make their bodies smaller, so that they did not take up too much space in my presence. They sat at the distance, squatting on the floor, while insisting that I take the plastic chair, borrowed especially for me from a neighbour who was financially better off. It took several minuted to convince them that I was perfectly comfortable sitting on the ground beside them." (p. 20)

Radhika Iyengar's quest has begun there. For almost eight years she observed the lives of these people, and wrote about their struggles for self respect, in particular. Their stories reunited in this volume are heartbreaking. She gives a voice to the voiceless. Through her, their stories are listened and maybe in the future these people will receive the respect they need, and the Hindu society can guarantee some kind of economically position for them.

Radhika Iyengar's book is so dense and so personal. She doesn't write about general things, but about the people she met, and thus their story is transformed into her own. She sees insecurities, fears, and tears of her characters and she understands their world, the limitations and the rituals. Being a woman who writes about "life among the dead in Banaras" is pretty brave, but Radhika is more than brave. She's fearless, not only in spirit, but also in writing. She sees beyond her characters and she explains their lives:

> "Women in this community are constantly under surveillance. Like elsewhere in India, a woman takes her husband's name once she is married. From then on, a Dom woman is socially and financially dependent on him for the rest of her life. Without her husband, it is believed within the community that a woman has no essence of her own." (p. 4)

Iyengar beautifully writes about the Doms of Banaras, those who experience life and death in the same time. But life prevails, as always. "In Chand Ghat, children prance around, weaving in and out of homes and lanes, stirring up dust." (p. 227) Radhika Iyengar's characters had the courage to express their feelings, to tell the story of their lives, probably unaware of the importance of their gestures, and the large audience their stories will reach. I particular liked Dolly, a widow whose husband she believes was murdered by his friends; her brother, Lakshya, who is in love with a girl from a higher caste; Bhola, who dares to move

away to educate himself, leaving behind the life he was born into; Kamala Devi, his mother, a powerful woman who gave birth to nine children. All these people shared their lives and their impressive stories with the author. And it is wonderful to see Radhika's perception about them: "Over time, I have seen the people I have written about in this book grow up, form opinions, pursue their dreams and achieve their goals." (p. 320) Writing this book was a difficult task for the young Radhika Iyengar, as she tells us in the end:

> "When I began writing this book, there were moments when I asked myself: Why am I writing this book? Do I need to tell this story? Was it even my place to do so? […] I realized that this book needed to be written for the individuals who had carved out portions from their days to speak to me, and tell me their stories." (p. 321)

But she wrote it and what an important milestone she reached! This book is a truly masterpiece! *Fire on the Ganges* is a must read for all those interested in Indian culture.

I've never been to Varanasi, or Banaras, as they call it. There was always something that stopped me. But I was fascinated by the stories of the oldest city in the world. Reading this volume made me wonder. Maybe next time I will get to visit Banaras. Now I am ready to face the city of dead, as I know some of the true stories of those who live there.

About the Author:

Mihaela Gligor is Scientific Researcher in the Philosophy of Culture at The Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca, "George Barițiu" Institute of History, Department of Humanities, and also the founder and the Director of *Cluj Center for Indian Studies* from Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca.

Contact: mihaela.gligor@ubbcluj.ro.

Anti-Plagiarism Policy

The *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies*'s anti-plagiarism policy and procedure on preventing plagiarism in the studies published by the Journal:

The current document, in accordance with the Decision No. 82/4.01.2022 of the Administrative Council, the Decision No. 119/23.09.2021 of Babeş-Bolyai University's Senate and the Decision No. 15823/14.11.2022 of the Administration Council, describes the procedure of the anti-plagiarism analysis of manuscripts received for publication and the use of plagiarism detection software within the editorial office of *the Romanian Journal of Indian Studies*.

The objective of the present policy is to comply with research ethics in all the publications of the *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies*.

Babeş-Bolyai University's (henceforth BBU) anti-plagiarism policy aims to avoid intentional fraud (when certain data and information are used intentionally, without indicating their source by the person who publishes it) or the trap that some authors may fall into, when they take information from different sources without specifying them clearly and transparently, because of the mindset of sharing information online.

For the purposes of the present policy, BBU adopts the definition of plagiarism in Art. 4 of Law no. 206/2004 ("the appropriation of ideas, demonstrations, data, hypotheses, theories, results or scientific methods, regardless of the way they were obtained, presenting them as personal creation.") Authors must be aware of and understand that the *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* intents to prevent and sanction any form of plagiarism, as well as other forms of dishonest behavior, including, but not limited to, fabrication and/or falsification of data presented. Therefore, the authors submitting manuscripts for publication in the *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* are informed that attempted plagiarism and/or any other fraudulent action may lead to the rejection of the manuscript from publication, the official notification of the higher

education institution where the author is affiliated or to informing the academic community and the general public.

Following any notices of a possible plagiarism or other fraudulent actions regarding studies already published in the *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies*, and after a rigorous verification of such notices, the editorial office of the journal will take measures to notify all interested institutions, providing all necessary documents that provide evidence of plagiarism or other unethical scientific practices, and, at the same time, it will also publish the journal's official position regarding the respective situation, on the website of the journal (https://www.ceeol.com/search/journal-detail?id=1944).

The anti-plagiarism analysis and consequent report are carried out by the editorial office of the *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies*, as described below.

The editorial office of *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* will enter the text of the manuscript proposed for publication into the plagiarism detection software made available by BBU, within 30 days of receiving the manuscript. The report generated by the plagiarism detection software will then by analyzed by the editor-in-chief, and the invited editors of the issue. On the basis of these evaluations, an anti-plagiarism report will be created that will contain a list of documents identified as possible sources for certain fragments of the text and one or more similarity coefficient(s). Regardless of the alert threshold signaled by the plagiarism detection software, a qualitative analysis of the results of the automatic plagiarism detection will be performed, in accordance with the standards and specificities of the field. The manuscript will not be accepted for publication if the anti-plagiarism report shows that: (a) the unauthorised fragment(s) that were found in the manuscript are not justified and bear signs of plagiarism; or (b) the work contains intentional changes to the text, which indicate an attempt to conceal unauthorised use of fragments from someone else's work.

Each contributor to *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* will complete and sign a *Declaration of originality*, stating that “The article has not been published and is not being submitted or considered for publication elsewhere. The text, illustrations, or any other materials included in the article contains no violation of any existing copyright and does not infringe any rights of third parties.”

For general conceptual guidelines regarding plagiarism, the *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* recommends the following:

- Law no. 206 of May 27, 2004 updated version (http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/52457).
- *Avoiding Plagiarism*, published by Harvard University (https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/what-constitutes-plagiarism).
- *Plagiarism: Decision making & dealing with grey-zones across academic fields* (https://researcheracademy.elsevier.com/publication-process/ethics/plagiarism-decision-making-dealing-grey-zones-across-academic-fields) and *Plagiarism* (https://researcheracademy.elsevier.com/publication-process/ethics/plagiarism) published by Elsevier.
- *The Strategy for Preventing and Combating the Phenomenon of Plagiarism at Babeș-Bolyai University* (https://doctorat.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Strategie-Anti-plagiat-UBB-3.pdf) and the *Ethical Committee’s Guide for Students on Academic Honesty and Ethics* (https://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/despre/organizare/files/Comisia-de-etica-Etica-si-onestitate-academica-ghid-pentru-studenti.pdf).
- *COPE Recommendations on Publication Ethics* (https://publicationethics.org/).
- *Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing* (https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines/principles-transparency-and-best-practice-scholarly-publishing).

Call for papers

The *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* invites researchers and academics to contribute to the ninth issue (2025).

Contributions are welcomed in the form of studies or book reviews. The materials will be accompanied by an *Abstract* (10 lines) – except for book reviews – a list of up to ten *Keywords*, and by the author's bio-note. The language in which materials will be published is English. The deadline for the submission of the papers is 1 September 2025.

Materials, as well as general inquiries, can be sent via e-mail at mihaela.gligor@ubbcluj.ro.

The *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* is affiliated to *Cluj Center for Indian Studies*, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca.

Cluj Center for Indian Studies is dedicated to the research of Indian traditions, philosophies, languages and religions that render India as one of the most interesting and exciting cultures of the world. The center's main objective is the promotion of Indian culture and its better comprehension through complete programs of education, research and publishing.

Cluj Center for Indian Studies developed academic cooperation with well-known universities from India (among them: University of Calcutta, Jadavpur University Kolkata, University of Delhi, Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar) and similar centers from Europe (Centre for Modern Indian Studies (CeMIS), Georg-August Universität Göttingen, Germany, and Institute of Oriental Studies, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland).

Cluj Center for Indian Studies is open to all those who wish to get acquainted with at least a part of the incredible culture of India.

Among *Cluj Center for Indian Studies* activities are invited lectures on Indian culture, history, philosophy, literature, religions; workshops of Sanskrit, Bengali, and Hindi; courses of history, culture and civilization;

conferences, seminars, summer schools, book and film presentations; exhibitions of photography, documentaries, concerts of Indian classic music or dance recitals.

Romanian Journal of Indian Studies (Cluj University Press) represents a platform of disseminating the lectures hosted by the Center, as well as the results of the young Romanian (and not only) researchers with interests in Indian studies area.

Romanian Journal of Indian Studies is abstracted and indexed in C.E.E.O.L. (Central and Eastern European Online Library GmbH).

The 2024 issue of *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* was published with the generous support of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and the Embassy of India in Romania.

The *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* is affiliated to *Cluj Center for Indian Studies*, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, and represents a platform of disseminating the lectures hosted by the Center, as well as the results of researchers with interests in Indian studies area.

Romanian Journal of Indian Studies is abstracted and indexed in C.E.E.O.L. (Central and Eastern European Online Library GmbH).

ISSN:2601-064X
ISSN-L:2601-064X

Ministry of Culture
Government of India

Embassy of India to Romania
Ambasada Indiei în România